The British Elections

NOVEMBER 10, 1925 15¢

New Masses

U. S. S. R. Land of Plenty

By JOSHUA KUNITZ

John Reed and the World War

First of Five Chapters

By GRANVILLE HICKS

March of the Cripples by Bob B

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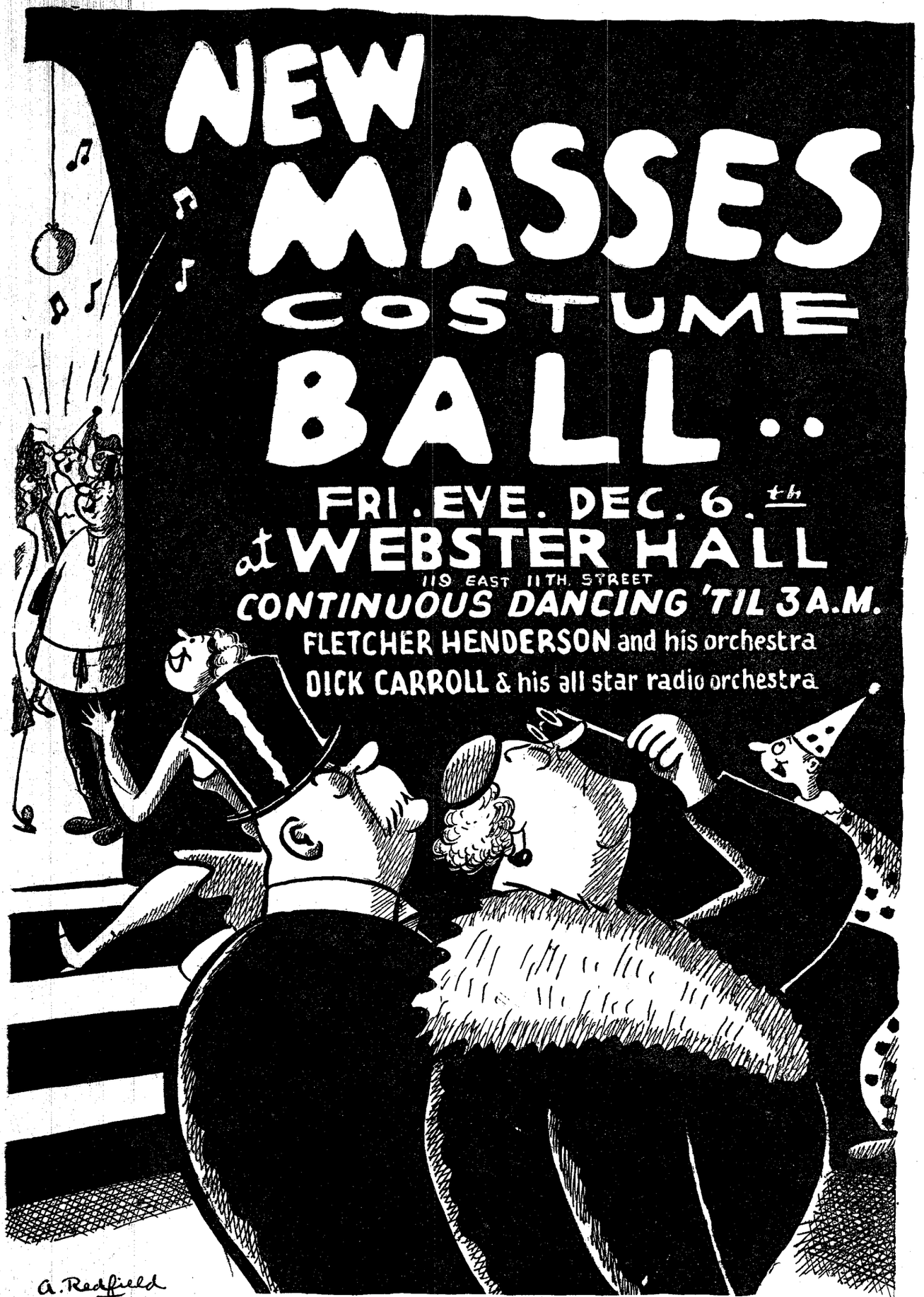

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New Masses

NOVEMBER 26, 1935

The Thomas-Browder Debate

WHICH road for American workers—Socialism or Communism?—a question millions are posing today, will be the topic of the Browder-Thomas debate in Madison Square Garden, November 27. In New York alone not less than half a million workingmen and women, who march in the May Day parades of the Socialist and Communist parties, are directly concerned in the debate. And not only the proletariat—their political opponents too manifest acute interest in the discussion. The crisis within the Socialist Party today, for example, receives detailed attention in The New York Times, for the question is a crucial one to capitalism. Which way will the American workers go? Will they combine forces for common aims? This is the question history has placed before the masses for solution, and which the foremost spokesmen of the American masses, Earl Browder and Norman Thomas, will debate at the Garden. All indications point to an overflow meeting. Any reader of THE NEW MASSES at all concerned in the destiny of America—of his own destiny for that matter—cannot afford to miss this discussion. We urge our readers to attend. We also invite our readers to send their views of the debate to THE NEW MASSES' correspondence columns which will be enlarged to permit of a thorough discussion of the problems posed. Which way will the American worker go? War or peace, fascism or democracy, are involved in the answer.

THE SPIRIT OF '36 — *Dixon*

Hoover—Phrase-Coiner

HERBERT HOOVER has always exhibited a certain ability as a phrase-maker. It seems only yesterday that he was coining that household expression about a "chicken in every pot and a car in every garage." Nor have these last few years of chicken-less pots and car-less garages dimmed the luster of his gift. "There are nests of constitutional termites at work," he warned the Ohio State Society of New York last week. Then he outdid himself with the observation that "There are only four letters of the alphabet not in use by the administration. When we establish the Quick Loan Corporation for Xylophones, Yachts and Zithers, the alphabet of our fathers will be exhausted. But, of course, the new Russian alphabet has thirty-four letters." That last sentence sounds as if Mr. Hoover was now seeing Reds lurking around the unused corners from which he used to predict that prosperity would emerge. It is only fair to point out that if the Red Menace that Mr. Hoover foresees is as long in materializing as the prosperity he used to promise us the constitution of our fathers is in no immediate danger. To the uninitiated Mr. Hoover's criticisms, if they can be dignified by that term, are bound to sound like an attack on the administration. Rugged individualist that he is, the former president reassured his audience that what he had to say was only the "stark rugged truth."

IT IS plain that Mr. Hoover is anxious to return to the White House and that he is trying to make himself the candidate of the ultra-conservatives. The speech to the Ohio Society was an attack on the whole concept of a planned society, but there was little in it that merits consideration. Any child can tell Mr. Hoover what he apparently does not understand: that the terms planned society and capitalism are antithetical and that any capitalist government that attempts planning is bound to come to a sorry end. On the other hand it is equally certain

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that a return to the era of unbridled competition that Mr. Hoover pleads for is no cure for the country's ills. But it is a mistake to think that the former president has any concern for the welfare of the masses; his loyalty is to his friends in the Liberty League who are trying to hammer out a program to suit their own ends that will sound acceptable to the American people. These reactionaries know that fascism is in disrepute; they conceal their real objective behind a smoke-screen of devotion to the constitution, but they constantly press for laws and interpretations of laws that will concentrate political power in their hands; they are opposed to all reforms however mild and they actually support every attack on constitutional liberties of the people. There is more than passing significance in Mr. Hoover's assumption of the role of a Red-baiter: both Hoover and Mussolini camouflaged their attacks on democracy behind a prefaced desire to save their countries from Red Perils. Herbert Hoover is a discredited politician who has little chance of regaining his laurels, but those for whom he speaks are real dangers to democracy.

Balancing Whose Budget?

WHILE President Roosevelt was ordering a budget cut of a half billion dollars for next year, Secretary of Commerce Roper was promising business an extension of the administration's "breathing spell." "Business profits cannot be penalized," Mr. Roper said, indicating a let-up in regulatory legislation as well as a determination to curb increases in tax rates. In explaining the contemplated budget cut, administration advisers were careful to say that the President does not plan to cut salaries or to curtail veterans' expenditures; the savings will come, they said, through a pruning of relief grants. The plan is to consolidate some relief agencies and abolish others. The public works program probably will be abandoned, thus leaving the Works Progress Administration to carry on all work relief, a move that will mean a large saving at the expense of the workers since P.W.A. pays prevailing wages while W.P.A. wages are scaled at from $19 to $94. Another saving is being effected through denial to states of further Federal grants-in-aid for direct relief under the pretense that the states are now able to care for their own unemployed, although it is well known that many states and municipalities have been saved from bankruptcy in the past few years only through Federal cash. The result will be a disastrous slash in the already meager doles being given to the jobless. Local and state governments are peculiarly susceptible to pressure to prevent levying taxes on large corporations, and states saddled with increased relief burdens can expect renewed campaigns for sales and other consumers' taxes which will burden the lower middle class and help big business gobble up or crush its small competitors.

Difficulties in Africa

GENERAL DE BONO who has been in charge of Italy's Ethiopian campaign has been called home and kicked upstairs to the post of field marshal. His place in Africa has been taken by General Badoglio who promises a more vigorous conduct of the war. Obviously Mussolini is not satisfied with the progress of the campaign. Military observers point out that unless far greater advances are made in the near future Italy cannot hope to complete the conquest of Ethiopia before the next rainy season sets in. Meanwhile sanctions have gone into effect and the Italian people, already on short rations, face even more acute sacrifices. The cost to Italy in casualties has already been far greater than the fascists care to admit. Suez Canal authorities reported last week that more than ten thousand wounded and sick Italian soldiers had passed through on their way home. A combination of hardship at home and losses abroad is apt to result in repercussions in Italy unless Mussolini's troops can win some spectacular victories and doubtless Badoglio has been commanded to produce them. If the Ethiopians persist in refusing to be drawn into a mass battle and save their strength for guerilla attacks they may yet prolong the conflict until labor boycotts and sanctions cause the collapse of the fascist regime.

Murder in the Gulf-Ports

AFTER seven weeks of incessant struggle in which several dock-workers have been murdered, scores wounded and many hundreds arrested, the strike of the Gulf longshoremen is now entering its decisive stages. Win or lose, this strike is of major national significance and of the utmost importance to American labor. Victory for the strikers in their fight for recognition of the International Longshoremen's Association will result in the consolidation of the East and West Coa divisions of the I.L.A. into a power and continuous chain of unionism linking every seaboard port of the country. Victory will not only result in virtual 100 percent unionization of the maritime industry, but will greatly strengthen the position of the A. F. of L. in all Southern states and industries. Furthermore, the importance of the strike is emphasized by the strategic role played by marine workers in anti-war actions. West Coast longshoremen and seamen, solidly organized under aggressive leadership, have delivered telling blows against war by striking against shipment of military materials to Italy. Scab longshoremen in the struck Gulf ports have, during the past few months, loaded enormous quantities of cotton, oil, lead, etc., to supply Mussolini's war needs. A complete shutdown of Gulf shipping serves to enforce the boycott against Italy.

TWO additional factors must be emphasized in the struggle as it stands to date: first, the question of solidarity on the part of the I.L.A. on a national scale and by the other maritime unions. On the West Coast the longshoremen and seamen, true to their fighting reputation, have already tied up the "hot cargo" ships. On the East Coast, President Ryan, of the I.L.A., while formally endorsing a 100 percent boycott of Gulf shipping, actually has taken no step for its enforcement. Hence the most urgent requirement in the present situation is the enforcement of a complete national boycott of shipping to and from the Gulf by longshoremen and seamen. Such support would speedily bring the strike to a successful close. Secondly, the labor movement in general, all liberal and progressive individuals and organizations, should waste no time in protesting and demanding an end to the rule of blood and thunder which has resulted in a number of deaths. A demand that the anti-union injunctions be lifted, that all civil and democratic rights be returned to the strikers in the Gulf ports, should be sent to the Governor of Louisiana in Baton Rouge, and to the Mayors of New Orleans, Lake Charles, La., and Houston, Texas.

Nazi Steel

NEITHER the American steel barons nor William Randolph Hearst have been distinguished for op-

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position to Adolf Hitler who owes part his success to the material aid given by the Thyssens and the Krupps. But a $40,000 order given by P.W.A. for processed steel on New York's new tri-borough bridge has disrupted the cordial relations between the groups. The steel trust, notorious for its price-fixing and gouging, is up in arms at this outrageous invasion of its right to make profits on every dime's worth of steel sold in this country. Mr. Hearst says that "it (the purchase of German steel) is all the more heinous in the case of Germany because she is one of the debt-repudiators with whose present medieval rulers we can have nothing in common." This outburst of indignation against the Nazi steel-makers has nothing in common with the boycott being enforced by labor and friends of liberty against the Hitler regime. Hearst and United States Steel are in fact using the sales incident to whip up the same kind of narrow nationalism on which Hitlerism thrives.

The Specter Haunting the South

A GRAND jury of seventeen white men and one Negro has returned new indictments in the Scottsboro case. The Negro was placed on the jury to conform to the letter of the supreme court decision forbidding race discrimination but indictments in Alabama may be returned by a two-thirds vote. A single juror is powerless. Friends of the Scottsboro boys must, furthermore, remember that tremendous pressure can be brought to bear on any Negro who is chosen. The Jackson County Sentinel, in arguing against Negroes serving on juries, remarked that "a Negro on an Alabama jury would be a curiosity and curiosities are sometimes embalmed, you know." That lynch threat will face any Negro who dares to vote against a verdict demanded by the powerful southern landlords. The truth is that the guilt or innocence of the defendants is not an issue in the Scottsboro case; no sane person can believe, in the face of Ruby Bates' repudiation of her testimony, that they are guilty of the crime charged. A specter is haunting those who control the South: the fear of unity between poor whites and Negroes. They are willing to go to any lengths to keep intact the regime of violence against Negroes, an invaluable agent for dividing—and ruling—the exploited groups.

WHILE the Scottsboro boys were being re-indicted, an Atlanta judge was hearing Angelo Herndon's application for a writ of habeas corpus. The application for the writ is based on a Supreme Court decision holding that where the constitutionality of a statute has not been determined due to technical legal reasons, a prisoner may have a writ to determine that question. Whitney North Seymour, Herndon's attorney, retained by the I.L.D., argued that the application of the ancient insurrection law on which his client was convicted violated the due process of law clauses of both the Georgia and the federal constitution. The trial judge reserved his decision, but it is certain, if necessary, that an appeal will be taken from his holding; the six Supreme Court judges who sought to wash their hands of the case last spring will be faced with it again. Because of the widespread publicity surrounding the Scottsboro and Herndon cases the South has had to comply with established legal procedure. But John Sloan, another Georgia Negro, was not so fortunate. He was charged with killing a white man last spring and in the hunt for him another Negro was slain. Some time ago Sloan was captured in Florida and taken back to Georgia, but his place of confinement was kept secret. All attempts of his friends to locate him and supply counsel were in vain; the first inkling they had of his fate came last week when newspapers announced that the militia was being sent to safeguard his trial. The trial was a farce. It lasted less than a day and Sloan was convicted and sentenced to death. In an effort to cover up the farcical character of the proceedings the obliging Associated Press has broadcast reports making heroes of the militia men who are credited with having saved Sloan from a mob. Nothing has been said about the fact that he is the victim of a legal lynching.

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"Perfectly Marvelous"

THE New York City News Association's reports are matter of fact; they do not dress up their copy, and quote people — especially important people—pretty accurately. On Tuesday, Nov. 12, the City News sent out the following over their wires, on the arrival of the Ile de France:

> The Princess Braganza, who once was Marie Hayes of Jacksonville, Fla., expressed the greatest admiration for Adolf Hitler after spending two months in the Rhine Castle owned by Major T. Oakley Rhinelander.
>
> "He has the people in the palm of his hand. It is marvelous. They just worship him," she said. "Every man you see is armed. It is a perfectly marvelous situation."
>
> The Princess is the widow of Prince Alfonso of the Spanish royal line.

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We "Free" the Filipinos

THE inauguration on November 15 of the Philippine Commonwealth government with Manuel L. Quezon as its president and former Governor Frank Murphy as the first High Commissioner, was the subject of considerable speculation and much ballyhoo in the American press. All the editorial writers from East to West felt very good about Uncle Sam's generosity in granting "independence" to the Philippines.

The Tydings-McDuffie Bill was the basis for the grant of independence; it provided for a Commonwealth government on the islands for a ten-year period. What few editorial writers admitted, however, was that the bill was passed at the insistence of the American monopolists' sugar and dairy interests. They have now succeeded in limiting the imports to the continent from the Philippines of duty-free sugar cane, cocoanut oil, cordage and tobacco products. It doesn't work both ways, however. During the ten year transition period all Yankee products may enter the Philippines duty free. The officials of the American Federation of Labor may feel proud that they supported and fought for this bill which reduced the Filipino people to a degraded status, permitting the immigration of but fifty islanders a year into the country, whereas no barriers whatsoever were placed on American immigration to the Philippines. All Americans incidentally acquire all the rights of Filipino citizens.

Among other similar advantages to the Filipino people, the generous bill provides that during the ten-year transition period a Filipino army must be constructed, subject to draft by the United States; that the sixty-six United States naval and military bases on the islands be retained; that English must be taught in the schools; that Filipinos may not make treaties with foreign powers without the agreement of the United States government. Thus, forestalling quite effectively, any attempt the Filipinos might make for economic self-sufficiency.

The Filipinos are not as grateful for the blessings of Uncle Sam as Washington would have us believe. Three major peasant uprisings have occurred there since 1926. The bill, among other things, was an attempt to allay the unrest by palming off a phony independence on the natives. It was Uncle Sam's answer to the persistent demand of the Filipino people for real independence, a demand which carried them through one revolution against Spain, another against the United States. The bill also sought to quiet the daily, local resistance against the fawning native racketeers, who hold the reins of power by force of arms—such men as Quezon and Osmenas.

The question of the next world war which may quite possibly be staged in the Far East was also a factor in pacifying the army and navy crowd's opposition to even this brand of independence. According to the 1921 Washington treaty the United States dare not further fortify the Philippines. But the Filipinos, now a "nation" in their own right, may very well arm up to the hilt under the guidance of the United States War Department; and this is exactly what is happening.

Manuel Quezon lost no time in asking for a military mission and General MacArthur is already on Philippine soil organizing the "defense" forces. Filipinos are being trained in American aviation schools so that they can return and build aviation units for the protection of American money invested in the islands, for the maintenance of America as a factor in the Orient. For the United States will never surrender the Philippines willingly. They are strategic as a military and economic outpost of American imperialism and contribute to the "political equilibrium" of the Far East, as Stimson once put it.

The forces toward renewed upsurge in the Philippines were clearly outlined in the recent elections for President and other offices in the Commonwealth government. The Quezon and Osmenas Coalition, or Nacionalista Democrata Party, represented native bourgeois landlords, subservient to imperialism and its demands, and political racketeering that would turn Tammany Hall green with envy. The National Socialist Party, headed by Aguinaldo, one-time president of the short lived Philippine republic, represented mostly the veterans and the hard pressed small proprietors and small landowners whose existence becomes more precarious daily.

Representative of the most militant elements in the Philippines, Bishop Gregorio Aglipay, head of the Philippine Independent Church, ran on a united front ticket and secured a large vote from the worker and peasant masses. Both Aglipay and Aguinaldo were against the Tydings-McDuffie Bill. They carried demands in their platform for the lessening of the tax burdens, against high land rents and usury, for unemployment relief, and other planks affecting large masses of the people. Naturally, the fight against corruption in the government was particularly stressed.

Manuel Quezon was elected President, not by the ballot of the people, but by his election inspectors. He is in constant fear of assassination, even when he comes to the United States—so well is he loved by his people. At the inauguration he devoted one-third of his speech threatening the revolutionary elements with even greater terror if they did not end their fight against him.

An election in the Philippines today is a farce, since there is no freedom of speech, press or assemblage for those who would speak against the existing order. The inhuman living conditions of the peasants and workers, out of which grew the last Sakdal uprising in 1935, are still there. Quezon's only way out is to employ still further terroristic methods against those opposing him. He promises to become the Machado of the Orient. However, the crop limitations imposed by the Tydings-McDuffie Bill and the effects of the general crisis will still further intensify the resistance to Quezon and his flunkey regime.

The fact that numbers of Tangulans, Colorums, Sakdalistas, and Communists, all political prisoners, were freed on November 15, the inaugural date of the Commonwealth is due in part to the series of cables sent from the United States, and popular pressure here, demanding such amnesty. The Committee on Amnesty for Filipino Prisoners was composed of such organizations as the American Civil Liberties Union, International Labor Defense, Friends of the Chinese People, the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the National Committee for Defense of Political Prisoners as well as individuals.

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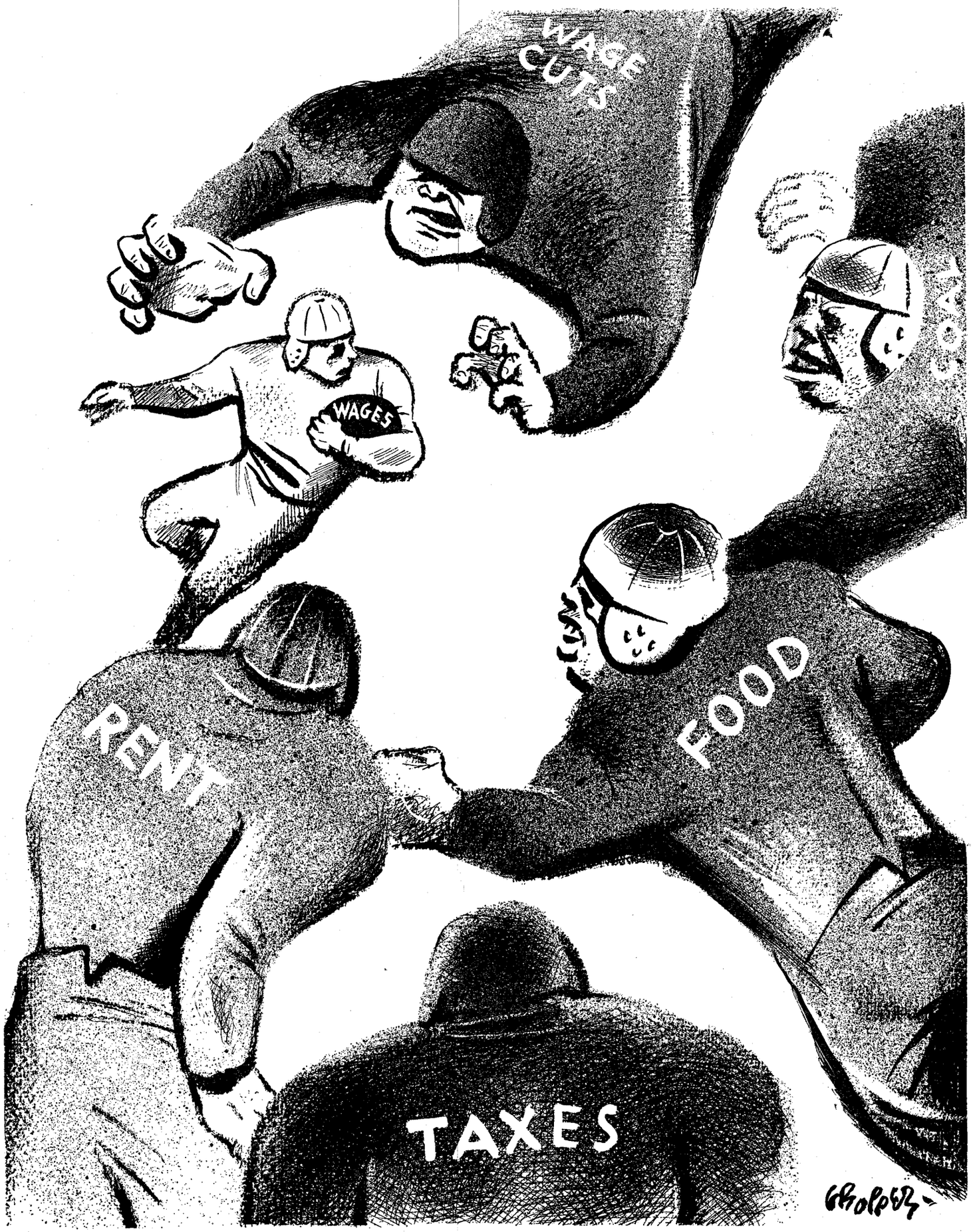

THE 1935-YARD LINE

William Gropper

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Conspiracy in Brooklyn

DISTRICT Attorney William F. X. Geoghan of Kings County, in June of 1934, addressed a meeting of the Eighth District Democratic Club in Brooklyn and made a few statements which he will undoubtedly live to regret. "Picketing," he said, "is a form of racketeering." That wasn't all. "We must dust off our judicial precedents in order to abolish this nuisance of picketing."

By Oct. 25, 1935, the District Attorney had evidently done enough dusting to uncover Section 580 of the Penal Law, which is commonly known as the Conspiracy Statute, and now felt ready to make good his promise of a year before that he would rid Brooklyn of that "form of racketeering."

It is quite possible that he was so diligent in his dusting he scarcely found time to examine the Druckman murder case. He must have had quite a time discovering Section 580, for it had lain in disuse for 99 years, ever since the Geneva Tailors Case in 1836. No attempt, since that time, has ever been made in New York to invoke the conspiracy statute against a labor union.

Geoghan got his chance on Oct. 19 of this year, when three employes were fired by May's Department Store in Brooklyn for belonging to Local 1250 of the Department Store Employes' Union. On Oct. 21 ninety employes struck, led by the union organizers, Clarina Michelson and Irving Aarons. Picketing started, the police made wholesale arrests. Magistrates held the pickets in unusually high bail and, despite favorable testimony, defendants were found guilty and sentenced to as high as 10 days in jail for such offenses as uttering the following sentence: "Don't buy at May's. This place is on strike and if you work here you will be a scab."

Terrorization failed. On October 25 the District Attorney appeared before the Grand Jury, and pursuant to his direction the Grand Jury charged Clarina Michelson and Irving Aarons, the organizers, together with Pearl Edison, Marcia Silver and Elsie Monakian, three strikers, with "Having conspired to prevent another from exercising a lawful trade or calling by force, threats, intimidation, or by interfering or threatening to interfere with property belonging to another, and to do an act injurious to trade or commerce." The District Attorney then had the Court of Special Sessions issue bench warrants for the defendants and fix bail of $1,000 for each of them. All this was done in secrecy. For instance, Elsie Monakian learned she was "wanted" when she was dragged out of bed at one o'clock in the morning and taken to prison while bail was being raised for her. Mrs. Michelson was arrested as she was leaving a courtroom, and held in prison for thirteen hours until the union could arrange her bail.

The action of the District Attorney in invoking Section 580 against the strikers becomes more reprehensible and more openly a strike-breaking drive when one considers that Section 582 of the law specifically says: " . . . and the orderly and peaceable assembling or cooperation of persons employed in any calling, trade or handicraft, for the purpose of obtaining an increase in the rate of wages or compensation, or of maintaining such rate, is not a conspiracy." We agree that even non-legal English could not be any plainer than that.

However, Geoghan, in his anxiety to make good his promise to dust off judicial precedents for the purpose of ending picketing, decided that he would take a chance and prosecute these strikers for conspiracy, for he had nothing to lose. They might be found innocent, but in the meantime they would have to spend at least $150 in bail premiums, assuming that the girls could raise bail.

Ralph K. Jacobs, the Brooklyn Assistant District Attorney, directed the Grand Jury to order the case prosecuted in the Court of Special Sessions, where it would be tried before three judges without a jury, rather than in the County Court, where it would receive jury attention. Louis B. Boudin, counsel to the strikers, moved the case be transferred to the County Court. Judge Martin stated from the bench, in answer to the District Attorney's declaration that this was only a routine case, that "the decision in this case affects probably a half million union workers in the borough of Brooklyn, and every labor union throughout the state." And nobody will accuse the judge of exaggeration.

Boudin pointed out to the court that his researches in the subject had failed to disclose a similar case in the last hundred years. The District Attorney thereupon was compelled to admit that he, too, had been unable to uncover a similar case. The motion to have the case tried in the high court was granted over the District Attorney's strenuous objection.

It needs no great prophet to see what will happen to union labor throughout the state if the District Attorney is successful in establishing so vicious a precedent as he is here attempting to do.

Some time in 1926 a smart District Attorney in Brooklyn discovered that an old section of the Penal Law, namely Section 600, could be so perverted as to inflict a jail sentence on those who violated a labor injunction. Although this statute had been on the books for a great many years, it had never been used in a labor case. With the discovery that this section could be used against labor, Brooklyn began to flourish as an injunction Reno.

The granting of drastic labor injunctions in Brooklyn dates from the time of the discovery of Section 600. The situation became so acute that in the Spring of this year, as a result of tremendous mass pressure by a united front of *all* the labor unions in the state, the Legislature was compelled to do two things: one, to limit the powers of judges to issue injunctions restraining picketing; and, two, to declare that Section 600 was not applicable in labor disputes.

But Brooklyn district attorneys are resourceful creatures. They are trying to repeat their coup of 1926 by turning Section 580 into a new "Section 600."

Labor unions throughout the state should immediately rouse their members to an understanding of the dangers that they are facing—dangers striking at the very existence of the labor movement in this state. And certainly if New York permits the establishment of such a precedent—and New York has a relatively powerful labor movement—the rest of America will not lose time in following suit.

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The British Elections

JOHN STRACHEY

LONDON, Nov. 18.

THE result of the British election is about fifty seats worse than I thought it would be. In other words, I anticipated that the Labor Party would get 200 seats whilst in fact they have got 150. In itself that does not make very much difference, but what does make a disastrous difference is the fact of the Labor Party's failure to shake the national government's position.

That failure is the inevitable result of the last six months of Labor Party policy. One has only to compare results of by-elections in the early months of this year with what happened in the same constituencies at this general election to see how enormously the Labor Party has lost ground during 1935. I have not the slightest doubt, after examining the figures, that the Labor Party would have got a clear majority in the House of Commons at a general election held, say, last February. The successive surrenders of the labor leadership to the national government since that date have dissipated labor's strength. Mr. Baldwin reemerges as the supremely capable leader of the British capitalist class. It was essentially he who half-tricked, half-cajoled the labor leaders into the endorsement first, of the silver jubilee celebrations and then of the national government's foreign policy. He played on the ineffable toadyism, ignorance, stupidity and prejudice of the labor leaders with great skill. One must admit, however, that to outwit the present leadership of the Labor Party was for Mr. Baldwin like taking toffee from children, still, by the completeness with which he has got away with it and by the way in which he has managed to control his own nit-witted die-hards, and so prevent them from spoiling the game, he does reconfirm his position as a very great figure in the succession of British prime ministers.

On a former occasion, seeking for historical comparisons, I contrasted Mr. Baldwin's record and achievements with those of the nineteenth century English capitalist leaders such as Peel and Gladstone. But as Mr. Baldwin's seemingly interminable career unwinds itself, the observer's eye ranges back further to the beginning of the eighteenth century and lights on the squat figure of Robert Walpole as the one man in English history who Mr. Baldwin resembles.

How strange if it should turn out that the period of the English parliamentary and cabinet system should be opened and closed by fundamentally similar men! Robert Walpole was the first English Prime Minister and it may be that Mr. Baldwin will be the last. Walpole was in office over twenty years. Mr. Baldwin may yet surpass his record. The secret of both men's power is immobility, or rather their secret was an apparent immobility concealing imperceptible but decisive movements by which the thrusts of their opponents were deflected and destroyed.

The great question now is: what will Mr. Baldwin do with the British Empire? Will he throw its weight onto the side of peace, the League of Nations and the Franco-Soviet Pact? Will he complete this half-built wall against the aggression of the fascist powers? Or will he choose in the hope of deflecting that aggression away from the British Empire and onto the Soviet Union to support German and Italian fascism? On his choice hangs the future history of the world. My own guess is that characteristically and in full accordance with all the traditions of British foreign policy, Mr. Baldwin will do neither. He will simply refuse to make any outright choice. One moment he will appear to be supporting the fascist powers, at the next, the weight of the British Empire will be seen to move ponderously over toward an equivocal support of the League of Nations. Everybody will be kept in a state of the utmost suspense and alarm. Great Britain will remain uncommitted or will be committed, but to both sides about equally. Such a policy can only end in war; yet, it is the one to which the whole cast of mind of Mr. Baldwin and of most of his colleagues instinctively inclines. It would, however, be grossly misleading to suggest that the issue depends simply upon the personal choice of Mr. Baldwin or his colleagues. For the British working class can and will have their word to say in the matter. It should not be overlooked that even at this election, that even in conditions so extremely unfavorable for the Labor Party, that of the total votes recorded 54 percent were for the national government as against 46 percent against it. If a system of proportional representation were in existence in Great Britain, the government majority would be 48 instead of 240.

Thus the labor representation in the House of Commons, both in its quantity and its quality, gives no conception of the strength of the working-class movement in Britain. That strength is now once more upon the increase. Its failure to find adequate expression in the parliamentary field will unquestionably mean, as it has always meant before, that it will be deflected into the industrial field. We are almost certainly entering a time of intense and serious industrial disputes in Great Britain. It will be especially, I predict, in this field that the British working class will be able to exercise its pressure on the British government. The government may well be shaken to its foundations before it has been many months in office by serious industrial upheavals. The cost of living in Britain is now steadily rising. It may well be that the government's great rearmament program will prolong and even intensify the present industrial revival. In such conditions, anything may happen. If the British government is fully occupied at home, it will be less likely to undertake an adventurous foreign policy of support of the fascist states, or even to balance between them and the League states, it may yet be forced to come down definitely upon the side of the League, the Franco-Soviet pact and peace.

(These dispatches by John Strachey appear weekly in THE NEW MASSES.)

CONGRATULATIONS *William Sanderson*

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March of the Cripples

BOB BROWN

PAGE that hardy old artist, Hogarth! Call Goya back through the suffering centuries. To revivify our Art, languishing under incipient fascism. Take them to the Northwest corner of Eighth Avenue and Fifteenth Street and point out the devastating sight on Jimmy Walker's danceless West Side sidewalks of today. Show these old pictorial satirists the medieval sight of the picket line of the League of the Physically Handicapped and ask them outright, "Even in your dark eras of oppression did you ever see any demonstration as biting as this? Yet we call it Civilization."

There they hobble, wobble and gasp on the line, victims of infantile paralysis, sufferers from occupational diseases, consumptives, cardiacs, orthopedics, paralytics, one gassed vet, one jingling human skeleton with diseased bones riveted together with silver wire ("I've got enough silver in me to take us all to the circus," he growls, although we have been taught to believe that all cripples are cheery and sunny, from having to grin and bear it, from having to take it, still, on life-twisted jaws). A six-foot one-footer leads this heroic and historic picket line; his left leg was chopped off at the hip after an industrial accident. The lame leading the lame. Hearty red slogans go up to the stratosphere, shouted defiantly, in spite of Mayor La Guardia's Anti-Noise edict. Around and around they go, defying authority at the very door of the Port of Authority. ("They've sent out word not to arrest us," one of them explains, "but they'll have to come to it sooner or later, no matter what the public sentiment.")

Old Pop, 66 now, was set to washing lead type in a Boston print shop when he was 12. As a direct result, in middle age he was stricken down with lead poisoning that still gnaws his old bones. He can hardly put one foot before the other, but he's out on the line every day in all weathers, lips set stiff with thirty years of suffering, he serves as constant inspiration to the softer young. Unshed "tears of glass" gleam from this picket line and muffled "groans of lead" escape as the twenty handicapped pick their hop-skip-and-jump steps. Painfully they jerk and switch past, too close to the sidewalk for human comfort. Faces pale as Madame Tussaud's wax works, a crippled Coxey's Army, they mill round and round, sandwiched between their lettered slogans:

UNEMPLOYMENT BREEDS TUBERCULOSIS
—WE DEMAND JOBS—WE DON'T WANT
THE RUN-AROUND—WE WANT JOBS
WE PROTEST THE PAUPER'S OATH
WE HAVE NOT BEEN FORGOTTEN
—WE'VE BEEN IGNORED

They look like a tattered battalion of vets retreating from Hoover's one-sided Battle of Anacostia. But they aren't defeated. In spite of the fact that their struggle is a double one, that they are sensitive sufferers, averse to exhibiting their infirmities for the jibes and jeers. "But it's gone too far now," Jack Isaacs, their leader, says. "We've been pushed so far down we've just naturally got to rise again. Our backs are so close against the wall we can't go any farther back, so we're going forward." This is a finish fight for the rights of man, even crippled man. "We demand the right to live. We Want Jobs!"

WE DON'T WANT TIN CUPS!

Malformed hips in pants and skirts switch by in patient protest, paralytic lips twitch, there is a brave break in the voices that shout:

Russell T. Limbach

Protest to Mr. Ridder!
Support our demands!

Mr. Ridder, lame himself, now scuttles in and out of the mouth of his Port of Authority where the demonstration seems to have got him down, since it's gone on from 11 A.M. till 5:30 ever since Nov. 9. It's expected that on Dec. 1 Ridder will turn his job over to that super-cop Grover Whalen, who is hard-boiled and can take it. Ridder now scuttles through the line with his built-up shoe throwing him off balance, making him wobble. He's scared and jumpy, like the little boy in the Bronx whose father asked if he wanted to be taken to the Zoo. "No, Pop," the boy replied. "If they want me, they'll have to come and get me."

Ironically the street-corner wind whips and whistles the favorite Ridder slogan around, contorting it to "Protest to Mr. Ridder, that poor lousy man."

Passersby react according to their background and development. About half and half they cry "Shame" on the pickets and "Shame" on the Relief Administration. A few Hearst readers mutter "Communist rats," but though the pickets aren't in the Party yet they are getting great training, a growing in class-conscious conviction and courage. A few fellow cripples with jobs are incensed by the ugly display of physical infirmities; deformed themselves, they feel it is a personal reflection and construe it as exhibitionism, when it is exactly the reverse. "Why don't they go out and hunt for jobs, like we did, instead of wasting all that time and breath."

A picket on another permanent line has grown almost chummy with one of the cops stationed before the portals of the Port of Authority. The other day the cop burst out: "They ought to string up the whole bunch on telegraph poles."

"Better soft-pedal that," the picket advised, "or they'll be stringing up you flat feet."

An avalanche of emotional pity and gutter abuse from the sidelines, while the crippled body goes marching on, with time out for those who drop exhausted on the running boards of ritzy W.P.A. Cadillacs and Chryslers, idling at the curb with uniformed Negro and white chauffeurs, awaiting their masters who confer in treachery, sitting in sullen servitude while the white big shots of the relief racket hold windy double-cross conferences with the Boss Himself upstairs.

What damning contrasts in this crippled America, in our era of the survival of the unfittest!

A pretty picture, my masters, worn crutches resting against speckless auto fenders, worn pickets, young and old, snatching rest and

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risking arrest, gasping for new breath on the running boards of classy cars exclusively reserved for politicians. Picket-line twisted bodies collapsed on streamline Fisher bodies. A mad mess you've made of it, my masters.

The watchful cop toddles up, "Here, you can't do that!"

"But why not?"

"Well, it's State property."

"And who's the State, if it isn't you and me and everybody else?"

"Now, none of that red lip-stick!"

So next day, hobble and scuffle, shuffle and skip, the handicapped battalion of the unemployed lugs along a couple of orange crates, together with its other burdens and impedimenta. Luckily there is one consumptive among them who is otherwise able-bodied, so he does the bulk of the running and toting. The less lucky, quickly exhausted from clumping on sticks, wooden legs, orthopedic shoes and steel arches, drop out of the ricocheting line, take turns squatting on the crates, tucking whipping coattails around withered limbs, their finger-tips bitten by touching the cold metal of leg-braces.

Yet history doesn't have to go on repeating such inhumanities. None of us needs a tin cup, not one of us need whine "Alms for the love of Roosevelt, Mr. Ridder, alms." The ancient lowly would have prayed "From such relief relieve us," but this picket line makes demands and will win its relief direct, as its own divine right and without prayer:

> Our League *demands* that handicapped people receive a just share of the millions of jobs being given out by the government.
>
> We also *demand* that handicapped people be given preference on the 10 percent of the jobs allotted to persons not on relief.
>
> The Handicapped still are discriminated against by Private Industry. It is because of this discrimination that we *demand* the government recognize its obligation to make adequate provisions for handicapped people in the Works Relief Program.
>
> *Fight* for the adequate completion of the W.P.A.!
>
> *Fight* the discrimination against the handicapped!
>
> We *Demand* a job for every Unemployed Person!

What now, old satirist Hogarth, and you, fighting Goya, who put down the truth of your own epochs in screaming lines, shivering and pulsing naked. You who depicted excruciating portraits of the physically handicapped in your own dim day — both of you great art rebels, painfully aware of the anachronism of this human holocaust of 1935, in a day when one-sixth of the world makes seven-league strides with full employment under socialism. One-sixth on the up-and-up, against five-sixths on the down-and-out. You who see everything, blink your eyes open today in this city of empty skyscrapers, this self-elected government of empty promises, this lousy metropolis where Jimmy Walker once danced in the West Side streets, not a bull-throw from the Cripple Picket Line. Observe this flowering thistle of civilization nodding on its bayoneted stem. Then hie yourself to the nearest relief office, get a job on some artist project and do a mural on federal pay. Paint a collective picture of our collapse, never forgetting the upspringing beams of socialist light that show the way out. Make lithographs, drawings, engravings, etched inspiration for the masses. Dig your etching tools deep into the armored steel plate of unemployment for profit, dip your gravers into the biting acid, the poison of a decayed system that elects a cripple to the Presidency, appoints a cripple to administer relief in what, before socialism, was the most modern city in the world.

Show Ridder riding a crutch through this medieval picket line of 1935, depict his leering stool-pigeons trying to scare the crippled unemployed and hovering in the background, a gaga goofy ghost with jerky legs and a pepsodent smile soaring like a vulture over his White, White House.

Make it biting. Make it—FUNNY AS A CRUTCH.

And show also the hobbling boys and girls brought up alongside privileged but ailing Mayors such as La Guardia and Walker. Hate them now in December just as they did last May.

Here are some colorful facts for you to put in your picture, artists Goya and Hogarth:

Three Port of Authority Pickets crippled in industry:

1. Francois Porlier, born in Boston, 1869. Printer's apprentice at age of 12. Got lead poison from washing type. At 38 dislocated hip lifting heavy type case. The lead infection located there. For 23 years after that he limped painfully at work. Never could afford hospital, had to be on the job. Took to using a cane at work, but bosses wouldn't hire a lame man. So he gave up the cane, and the thing got worse. But he was a good lithographer and offset pressman, so he got $50 a week in good times.

Five years out of work now and can scarcely drag around, but his legs work better when he's out on the picket line.

2. Alex Soloma, sailor, working on sub-contract dredging job in East River, let by N. Y. City. In lifting a buoy mounting-stone the chain slipped and Soloma's leg was badly bruised by the barnacles stuck to the cement block. Next day he couldn't get out of bed. Friend called a cop, cop thought Soloma drunk because he was delirious with fever. Taken to Bellevue on a stretcher. Blood poison from barnacle bruises and river-bottom slime. Five operations, 18 months in hospital. Finally the doctor punched a gold wire through the spongy thigh bone and Soloma let him take it off at the hip.

Although assigned to the Rehabilitation Bureau for temporary pension while learning new trade, Soloma was let out after twenty weeks at $10 a week. Because the contract was sub-let he can't sue the city, so he leads the Unemployed Picket Line.

3. A veteran in the allied army. Railroaded from 1923 to 1931, broke down at work. Sent to Bellevue. Diagnosis, T. B. from exposure on job. Railroad gave him light work for a year, then put him on a pick-and-shovel job and fired him when he collapsed. When he objected the doctor told him, "You got wages when you were working. What more do you expect?" This company doctor lost his job soon afterward, when economy cuts came along.

A pretty case of discrimination: in 1927 Jack Isaacs got $15 a week as a linotyper because his legs were crippled, but not his

Russell T. Limbach

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hands. He worked alongside men getting $45 a week and turned out just as much work as they.

The Physically Handicapped of America are not eligible for Civil Service. They cannot get regular jobs as teachers or librarians in New York State. In the Soviet, however, there is no discrimination against the Physically Handicapped. They do light work, any kind they prefer.

The New York State Employment Agency has a separate division for the physically handicapped. They use them as strike-breakers by sending them to scab jobs.

Even a typist must pass a physical examination.

In private business the Physically Handicapped invariably are discriminated against. They work harder for less wages, on the theory that nobody likes to have a cripple around. Yet shrewd businessmen advise their Babbitt sons: "If you want to get ahead, my lad, hire a hunchback or some kind of a cripple for your secretary, preferably a woman, because they're more dependable and faithful. Cripples stick because it isn't so easy for them to get jobs, and the best thing about it is, you can pay them a lot less and they'll never squawk."

But this all began to change, dating from May 29 this year when a small group of the Physically Handicapped put on their vivid job-demanding demonstration before Oswald Knauth's Broadway Relief office. For eight days they stuck it out, sleeping on tables in the relief offices, kept without food; although their friends brought plenty it wasn't delivered. The yellow press called it a hunger strike, though actually they were being officially starved. By June 6 only three of them were left, Pauline Portugalo, Hyman Abramowitz and Morris Dolinsky. They were carried out on stretchers and the cops started a riot with their sympathizers on the street, resulting in the clubbing of cripples and their arrest on the charge of assaulting the police. One was said to have thrown away his crutches to fight a cop, but since he couldn't stand up without his crutches nobody swallowed this story but the Hearst press, which came out next day with "Cripples Throw Away Crutches and Pummel Cops."

Ever since then the fight has been going on. The government is now cutting off the unemployed, ordering them back to panhandling. It expects us to live on Rooseveltian private charity alone, in other words, to get by by begging from each other. Every one of us is nearer to the beggar's tin cup than ever before. And because the Physically Handicapped know best the bitter taste of that cup they are putting up the hardest fight.

U.S.S.R.—Land of Plenty

Abolition of the Food Card

JOSHUA KUNITZ

Moscow.

WITHIN the last year or so the Soviet Union has entered upon a new stage of economic development. The manifestations are numerous, diverse and multiplex. In these articles, I shall deal with some of them—the magnificent spurt of labor enthusiasm and productivity as expressed in the Stakhanov movement; the strengthening of the Soviet ruble; the rapid recovery of the Soviet railroads; the recent tendency of Soviet industry and agriculture to decline state subsidies; the vast extension of the network of stores, shops, and various other trading posts; the broadening of Soviet democracy and the revision of the Constitution; the industrialization of the Polar Region; the Model Statutes for Collective Farms and the new trend of granting the land to such farms for "eternal" use. In this article I will confine myself to the much-heralded and hilariously received abolition of the card system on foods. From this as a central theme, I shall branch off in subsequent articles into more or less detailed discussions of all the other topics mentioned in this paragraph.

One thing should be clear from the outset: the abolition of the food card in 1935, like its introduction in 1928, was not an isolated phenomenon, or a magnanimous whim of some impetuous Bolshevik. At the bottom of this change, as of all the other recent Soviet changes, lies one all-important, all-pervading fact; and that is—the tremendous increase in the means of production and labor efficiency in the U.S.S.R. "We can speak now of two processes which operate simultaneously and which are inseparably tied together," says Bukharin. "First, the quantitative and qualitative accumulation of productive forces connected with the opening up of new industrial plants and the increasing mechanization of our state and collective farms; second, the increased productivity of labor on the basis of mastering the new technique. Hence the tremendous growth of saleable goods produced by our socialist enterprises. (The remnants of old forms of individual production in city and village constitute a minute fraction of our country's total production.) It can now be said that the 'shortage' period in most branches of our socialist economy is over. But since, as we all know, the process of production determines the form of distribution, it follows that the end of our 'shortage' economy in production inevitably means the end of the card system."

Bukharin, who at one time opposed the whole idea of speedy collectivization and industrialization, now feels compelled to admit that "the complete triumph of Stalin's leadership is confirmed by an infinite number of facts" and that "the general line of the Party —both on its theoretical and practical sides —has stood the test of history." However, in extenuation of Bukharin's earlier errors it may be observed that in 1927-1928 the prospect of a successful outcome of the Party's policy was not as clear as it proved to be several years later. At that time the Revolution seemed to have reached something of an impasse. True, industries were slowly expanding, cities growing, tastes developing; the trouble, however, was that demands were mounting at a rate much greater than the possibilities of satisfying them. Millions of workers to whom such a trifle as a lump of sugar or a loaf of white bread had once been an unattainable luxury, now clamored for more sugar and bread and candy and pastries, for plenty of butter, eggs, fruit. Scores of millions of peasants who in the old days scarcely tasted their own produce (almost all of which went to the tax collector, the landlord and the church) now felt entitled to have their fill. "Why have we fought? Why have we shed our blood?" the average worker or peasant would query, striking an angry fist against an indignant breast. And the invariable answer was: "We have fought and we have shed our blood so that we can get the things that were denied us for centuries." A convincing answer, this—elemental, incontrovertible. Unfortunately things were much more complicated than that answer took into account.

After a series of wars, revolutions and invasions, after civil war and sickness and famine, the New Russia, though less drunken, had become even more ragged and more hungry than its Czarist predecessor. And seven or eight years of precariously peaceful reconstruction under the NEP (New Economic Policy) could scarcely remedy the havoc

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wrought by centuries of czarist ruin and neglect. In brief, after eight years of the NEP, there was still not enough to go round, still not enough even remotely to satisfy all the ravenously whetted appetites. Soviet agriculture and industry would have to produce very much more and would have to do it very quickly if the surging clamor for goods was to be met and the Revolution assured a normal course of development.

The crucial place was the village. As a result of the seizure of the landlords' estates by the peasants in 1917, large scale agriculture, though never too prominent in old Russia, was swiftly and, it seemed, irretrievably disintegrating. Larger farms were splitting into small and middle-sized ones: from eighteen million in 1918, the number of farms swelled to nearly twenty-six million in 1927. Farm implements were still largely primitive: on the eve of the First *Piatiletka* there were as many as five million *wooden* plows scratching the surface of tiny peasant fields. It was these farms that supplied almost all of the country's grain. The few collective and state farms then in existence produced only 6 percent of the total grain on the market. A new class of kulaks was striking root in the village. By 1927 it had become numerous enough and economically powerful enough to constitute a serious menace to the whole economic policy of the government. The situation was becoming acute.

STALIN, expressing the will of the majority of the Communist Party, urged rapid mechanization, large scale industry and agriculture, and a rigorously planned economy. Salvation, he maintained, lay only there. The Trotskyites scoffed; the Bukharinites trembled with fear; but Stalin's leadership triumphed. The two measures adopted by the Party—industrialization and collectivization—complemented each other. Soviet industry could not grow without the proper support of Soviet agriculture—sufficient bread, meat, dairies, vegetables, fruit for the cities; Soviet agriculture could not expand without support of industry—increasing quantities of modern implements, tractors, combines, elevators, silo towers, artificial fertilizer, transport facilities, and various other products of heavy and light industry, at reasonably low prices, for the village. Industry had to set the pace. The industrial proletariat, the backbone of the Revolution, had to assume the initial and preponderant share of the burden.

While agriculture remained individual, unmechanized, and relatively unproductive, the government could scarcely hope to gather enough food in its storehouses to meet the demands of the growing urban population. This would have been especially difficult under conditions of an uncontrolled market. The card system on bread and other food products was instituted, therefore, in order to ensure a food base for the rapid creation of a powerful socialist industry, which industry, in its turn, would ensure a machine base for the creation of a powerful socialist agriculture. The card system provided the industrial workers, the urban population, the industrial regions and the new plants that were being erected with sufficient, though not excessive, quantities of bread and other food products. At the same time, it protected the worker-consumers against the enormous speculative prices on the open market.

There were at one time seven different categories of cards. Workers in basic jobs, in metallurgy, coal, oil, etc., had cards of the first category, entitling them to the largest, though of course limited, quantities of food. The second category comprised workers in less basic or difficult jobs. They received less. There were also two categories of office workers, professionals, employes, etc. Then there were two categories of adult dependents —old parents, etc. The seventh category took in all children. People who had no good reason for not being engaged in gainful employment, as well as all those who because of their class origin or anti-Soviet activities were deprived of Soviet citizenship, had no cards at all—they had to get on as best they might.

Free trade practically ceased—at least legally. In the cooperative stores and bakery shops one could obtain nothing without a card, and nothing above the specified norm. Everybody was attached to his or her food shop (cooperative), bakery and dining room, and could obtain products nowhere else. The more favored groups—writers, artists, specialists, foreigners, members of the government and the O. G. P. U.—were in the same predicament, except that their shops were generally the best, both from the point of view of assortment of foods as well as quality of service.

To account for the full extent of the average Soviet citizen's joy over the abolition of food cards, one must understand the nature of the vast and manifold evils released by that system. First, the food cards led to a purely mechanical distribution of centralized products—consumers' demands were scarcely, if at all, taken into consideration. Each person received so much bread (black and white), so much butter, so much meat, so much sugar, so much fats, regardless of his individual tastes or needs. However irritated one might be by the wretched quality of the products dispensed or by the rude, inflexible and bureaucratic service, one learned from bitter experience that indignant arguments and objections were futile. The seller knew that the customer had no choice, that he could go to no other place, and could receive no other goods. Through some strange psychological quirk, the salesman in the cooperative often felt that he was doing one a favor if he waited on him, if he sold him any goods at all. I lived in the Soviet Union at that time. I do not exaggerate: there was nothing that I dreaded more than going to the cooperatives.

The indifference of the retail stores was communicated to the food producing organizations. There was little incentive and less pressure to improve the quality of the products. Bureaucracy in the trading organizations was rampant. It was due to the bureaucracy that the turnover of goods, even when there was a sufficiency of them, often approached the zero point.

Another serious evil was speculation. It was for the most part petty speculation—pitiful, contemptible. Yet considering the rigid card system, such speculation was inevitable and in some ways even useful. For one thing it offered a partial corrective to the rigidity of the rationing system. If one received too much bread on his card, he could sell it at a speculative price and buy something else that he needed more. Though the authorities frowned on it, the practice was common, and, I repeat, rather useful. A subtler evasion of the law was the direct exchange of commodities. It was a common thing in Moscow to see peasant women on corners handing pitchers of milk to customers in exchange for hunks of black bread.

THE simultaneous existence of two sets of prices—low, fixed government prices and high, speculative market prices—undermined the exchange value of the ruble. Thus, judged by the fixed low prices, the sum of a hundred rubles (my figures here are purely arbitrary) was a great deal of money; but what use was there of the hundred rubles, if your card allowed you only thirty rubles' worth of foodstuffs? On the open market your remaining seventy rubles could purchase very little. As a stimulus to greater effort, to harder work, the ruble was constantly losing in potency. The real stimulus came from the food card. But even that, at first, provided insufficient stimulus, since the compensation (food) was mechanically fixed and, before the udarnik (shock worker) movement started, no amount of diligent work would raise a second category worker into a first one, or would affect the quantity of food the worker could obtain on his card.

All these evils were aggravated by the fact that the industrial plan required the importation of machinery and experts from the capitalist countries. To pay for these, the Soviet Union, receiving little or no credit abroad, had to export materials it could scarcely spare, even foodstuffs. Moreover it was forced to institute a form of internal export, the Torgsin stores, where foreigners and natives in possession of gold or foreign currency could obtain things in limitless quantities and of superior quality. The Torgsin though useful at the time, also brought its concomitant evils. It tended to reduce further the prestige of the Soviet ruble as a medium of exchange. It stimulated speculation on the Black Bourse. (At one time a dollar brought as high as fifty or sixty rubles on the Black Bourse.) It generated envy and bad blood: the less educated and not-too-well-fed-and-clothed Soviet citizen, who had

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neither gold nor valuta (generally received from relatives abroad or obtained on the Black Bourse) was prone to regard inimically the luxurious shops, window displays and opulent customers of the Torgsin.

Yet all these negative features notwithstanding, the card system produced the one major result expected of it. By rationing out the small quantities of available food, it not only enabled industry to function and develop, but also made possible the feeding of regions which according to the government plan were concentrating on cotton, flax, sugar beets, that is, regions producing raw materials for industry. The first three years of collectivization, with the consequent temporary disorganization of agriculture, slaughtering of cattle and widespread sabotage, further augmented the need for food rationing. Truly the role of the food card in the first period of industrialization and collectivization, when there was a universal shortage of commodities, can scarcely be exaggerated.

With the progress of the Five Year Plan, however, the accelerated development of industry and the improved functioning of the state and collective farms, the food card from a useful instrument of change began to evolve (such are the laws of dialectics) into its direct opposite. Its negative features commenced to make themselves more distinctly felt and by 1934, the food card, its historical function performed, became a definite hindrance to the further development of Soviet economy. It complicated the whole accounting system; it hampered the free circulation and the growing quantity of goods; it obstructed any efforts toward improved quality and increased variety of food commodities; it perpetuated speculation.

As far back as 1930, Stalin, while sharply criticizing the bureaucracy in the cooperatives and other trade organizations, indicated the imperative need of improving and extending Soviet home trade. The following year, the Central Committee of the Communist Party returned repeatedly to the problem of Soviet trade, now castigating the employes and managers of the whole trading apparatus for their inability to develop home trade by overcoming the "mechanical distribution of goods," now urging measures that would lead toward the final abolition of food rations, norms, cards, centralized distribution and would hasten this restoration of free Soviet trade.

The first practical step was made in May, 1932, when collective farms, as well as collective farmers individually, were allowed to sell their surplus grain on the specially constructed Kolkhoz markets. Then, in 1933, the year of the great harvest, the next considerable step was made: hundreds of large, well-equipped and abundantly stocked commercial stores opened all over the Union. Now the Soviet citizen, if he had the money, could supplement his rations with unlimited purchases in the state's commercial stores. The assortment of all brands of edible goods was as ample as in the Torgsin shops, but here one could purchase with Soviet money.

The commercial stores, like the Kolkhoz markets, served as correctives to the rigidity of the food card system. What is more, they strengthened the ruble by increasing its purchasing powers, they lessened speculation and prepared the ground for the final abandonment of food rationing altogether.

THE price policy pursued by the Soviet state through its commercial stores was an exceedingly cautious and subtle one. The commercial price was conceived as a step between the excessively low price in the closed cooperative stores and the exorbitantly high speculative price on the open market. The whole purpose was gradually to bring the three divergent prices to one uniform level. Prices in the closed stores were slowly raised, while market prices tended to sink down to the level of those prevailing in the commercial stores. This was natural: people refused to pay high prices on the open market when they could get the same or superior merchandise at lower prices in the state commercial stores.

The success of the commercial shops and bakeries was phenomenal. In March, 1933, there were 446 commercial bread shops in four different localities; in June, 576 shops in six localities; in September 3,650 in 122 localities; in December 4,659 shops in 255 localities; in March, 1934, the number jumped to 5,231 in 361 localities; and finally in December of the same year to 5,888 in 746 localities. In the three months of April, May and June (1933) the commercial shops sold 1,117,000 tons of bread; in the next three months 1,991,000 tons, following that 4,591,000 tons, then 5,024,000 tons, then 6,733,00, etc. Also the price policy of the government was splendidly justified. In 1933 the price of corn bread, for example, in the closed shops was raised from 12.5 to 25 kopeks per kilogram. (In 1934 to 50 kopeks), while the commercial price during the same period was reduced from 250 kopeks, to 200 to 150. Simultaneously the market price began to fall—in Moscow by 48 percent, in Gorky by 43 percent, in Stalingrad by 75 percent, etc. In short, bread prices on the open market were coming nearer and nearer to those in the commercial stores. Finally, in January, 1935, the bread card was abolished. The results were so encouraging that nine months later all food rations were abolished, the price of bread was considerably reduced and single prices on food products were established in all state and cooperative stores.

Immediately market prices on all food stuffs began to fall. What made this change possible? I have already suggested: the success of the Five Year Plan, *i.e.*—the tremendous increase of the means of production and of labor efficiency in Soviet industry and agriculture. But of this in my subsequent article.

Another article by Joshua Kunitz dealing with significant developments will appear in an early issue.

MINERS

Drawing by Joe Jones, in the Artists Congress Exhibition, A.C.A. Gallery

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John Reed and the World War

1. "This Is Not Our War"

GRANVILLE HICKS

At the outbreak of the World War, John Reed was not quite twenty-seven years old, but he was one of America's most famous war correspondents. After his graduation from Harvard in 1910, he spent eight months abroad, and then returned to work on the American Magazine. During the next two years he won something of a reputation for his stories and poems, wrote a famous Dutch Treat Club play, became one of the editors of THE MASSES, *was arrested in Paterson, and staged the Paterson strike pageant in June, 1913. The next December the Metropolitan Magazine sent him to Mexico to report the revolt of Villa and Carranza against President Huerta. He was with Villa and Villa's men for four months, spending several weeks with a volunteer troop in the mountains of Durango, and witnessing the capture of Torreon by Villa's army. His reports brought him instant fame and the name of "the American Kipling." It was therefore inevitable that the Metropolitan should send him to Europe to cover the western front. From the chapter that follows, the first of five to be published in* THE NEW MASSES, *certain sections that will appear in the book have been deleted. These deal with more personal episodes in the six months that the chapter embraces. Whatever pertains to Reed's observations of the war has been retained.* G. H.

ON AUGUST 13, 1914, John Reed sailed for Italy. Before he left, he did an article for THE MASSES that showed how clearly he understood the fundamental issues of the conflict he was to report. "The real war," he wrote, "of which this sudden outburst of death and destruction is only an incident, began long ago. It has been raging for tens of years, but its battles have been so little advertised that they have been hardly noted. It is a clash of traders." The German Empire began, he pointed out, as a trade agreement, and not merely the German army but the whole imperial system had been tolerated by the progressive burghers of the country because they believed that commercial advantage would depend on army force. The French and English traders, having seized the most desirable colonies while Germany was disorganized, talked hypocritically about peace and the *status quo*. France blocked German trade expansion in northern Africa; England checked her advance in Asia Minor. It was no wonder that the business men of Germany supported the Kaiser in his belligerent gestures. His talk about blood and iron was nauseating, but Reed found it less sickening than "the raw hypocrisy of his armed foes, who shout for a peace which their greed has rendered impossible."

And he regarded as even more disgusting "the editorial chorus in America which pretends to believe—would have us believe—that the White and Spotless Knight of Modern Democracy is marching against the Unspeakably Vile Monster of Medieval Militarism." "What had democracy to do," he asked, "in alliance with Nicholas the Czar? Is it Liberalism which is marching from the Petersburg of Father Gapon, from the Odessa of pogroms?" "We must not be duped," he insisted, "by this editorial buncombe about Liberalism going forth to Holy War against Tyranny. This is not Our War."

There were an Italian marquis and a count on board his ship, an Italian capitalist who owned a silk mill in Paterson and had helped break the strike, several German barons, an Austrian count, officers of all nationalities, and some three thousand Italians, most of them called home for army duty. Next to the suffering of the workers in the steerage, workers going home to be shot for the sake of the kind of men who laughed from the first-class deck at their misfortunes, what chiefly impressed Reed was the friendliness of the different nationalities. Two Germans, an Italian, and a Frenchman, all on their way to join their respective armies, played bridge together daily. The Germans and Italians read French novels. One German had spent most of his life in Paris; another was a student at Oxford. The young Italian marquis had been educated at the Sorbonne and had worked on a London newspaper. The wife of one of the Frenchmen came from Berlin. "Amusements, education, the intellectual strength of every man on board, came, at least in part, from the very sources they were going blindly to destroy. It was all so confused—so unutterably silly."

It was so silly as to be incredible. Even the sight of British battleships and torpedo-boats off Gibraltar could not make the war seem real. The arrival of a British force suggested a kind of elaborate, humorless joke. The officers were so extremely British, so satisfied with their ignorance of German and Italian, so clearly the kind of men who knew cricket and football scores and took a cold tub every morning, that Reed could scarcely realize the seriousness of what was happening for the Germans on board. Fifty of them were taken off the ship to be interned. The man who signed a promise not to fight, though he had weak lungs and had long been exempt from service, was disgraced in their eyes. It was more than silly; it was insane.

AS the ship steamed into the harbor of Naples, the singing of the men and women in the steerage was sweet and healthy, but Italy itself was as mad as the rest of Europe. The pacifists had hoped to take advantage of the division of sentiment between the party of the Entente and the party of the Triple Alliance. But the middle class, having defeated the clericals and the conservatives, had disposed of a large section of the unemployed, who had been the principal reliance of the radicals, by recruiting an honorary volunteer regiment for Tripoli. One hundred and fifty thousand laborers, unable to get either work or relief, joined. The trained regiments were brought back and sent to the Austrian border, and the most dangerous elements of the Italian population were marooned in the Sahara desert.

Reed went to Geneva, whence he took what was said to be the last train to Paris. At Cernadon they pulled into the station beside ten third-class carriages, which rocked with singing and cheering. The doors and windows were decorated with green vines and tree-branches, through which he could see the young faces and waving arms of the class of 1914—"bound for the military centers to undergo a training that would stamp out all their impulses and ideas, and turn them into infinitesimal parts of an obedient machine to hurl against the youth of Germany, who had been treated the same way." The veterans whom he later saw did not cheer or sing; they had "the curious, detached professional air of men going to work in a silk mill in the morning." "Beasts, they wisely spent their spare time eating, drinking, and sleeping, and for the rest obeyed their officers. That was what the class of 1914 would become." With the ten third-class carriages joined to their train, they passed through crowded stations, where women cheered and wept and waved their handkerchiefs. At Bourg there was a glimpse of several cars of wounded men, and the sight of bandages and the smell of iodoform dispelled what was left of the sense of war's unreality.

Paris was dead. There were no omnibuses, no trucks, no street-cars. Shutters were pulled over store-windows. No one sat befor the cafes on the Grands Boulevards. Not a person could be seen on the Rue de la Paix. Above silent streets the five flags of the allied nations drooped somberly from every window. The flags were everywhere, ghastly, irrelevant. "It was as if the city had decked itself out for some vast rejoicing, and then had sickened." At night the theaters were closed, and the streets were dark and

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PENCIL SELLERS—CLASS OF '17

Drawings by Kerr Eby, from his exhibition, "The Tragedy of War," at the Frederick Keppel & Co. Gallery

empty. Only the great white beams of the searchlights could be seen crossing the sky, and the one sound that broke the stillness of the night was the marching of troops along the cobblestones.

Reed looked for the courage that he expected from the French, and the stoicism that so many correspondents had attributed to them. What he found was ignorance and apathy. The rich left the city, offering their mansions to the Red Cross in the hope that they would be saved from destruction. Shopkeepers boarded up their stores and announced that they had joined the army. Later he saw the rich come back to their mansions and the shopkeepers to their stores. He found the leaders of the Confederation Generale du Travail cooperating with the government, and the Socialists and Syndicalists supporting the war, while the capitalist press called for the suppression of civil rights, under the pretense of wartime necessity, and advocated the ending of the reforms that labor had won.

The war no longer seemed silly; but it was more confusing than ever, and infinitely depressing. It was difficult for Reed, as he saw the docility of the soldiers, to hold to his belief that revolutionary change would come out of the war. Moreover, although he had seen nothing of the front, what he had witnessed in Paris was enough to convince him of the tremendous mechanized brutality of the struggle. There was no romance in it. To the personal depression of a sensitive man with a deep feeling for humanity's sufferings was added the disappointment of the war-correspondent. Even if he had not been cooped up in Paris and half-sick with indigestion, this was not a war he could write about as he had written of Villa's battles in Mexico.

HE sat about with the other correspondents, all of them barred from the front, discussing the likelihood of a siege, the causes of the war, and the badness of the meals. Occasionally a German airplane flew over the city, and citizens would hurry to the rooftops to shoot at it. Official statements spoke only of the success of the army's tactical retreat. As stragglers came into the city, the conviction grew that the Germans were within a few miles of Paris. Robert Dunn, a correspondent as restless and as defiant of fear as Reed himself, suggested that they rent an automobile, secure a pass on the pretense that they were going to Nice for their health, and try to work their way to the front.

The pass carried them through the defenses of the city, frantic with preparations for a siege, and they turned north. They met refugees, some pushing on towards Paris, others waiting by the roadside, their enormous farm-wagons piled high with bedding, furniture, and all the little treasures they had been able to snatch. Finally they came to a village that had been demolished the day before by the Germans. The driver of the car refused to go further, and they paid him and sent him back. Although they tried to avoid troops as far as possible, they fell in, towards evening, with the guard of an ammunition dump. The soldiers greeted them with kindly, gentle curiosity, and gave them rum. The Germans were no worse than others, a man told him. "Lord help us," he said, "the Germans as a rule are good enough chaps. It's a silly business, this killing of men."

Another spoke up, "I'm not for war on any count. But us Socialists, we're taking the field to destroy militarism—that's what we're doing. And when we come back again after the war, and Kitchener says to the House of Commons, 'What will we do for these brave soldiers to show our gratitude for saving the Empire?' we're going to say, 'You can just give us the Empire.'"

An officer came up and told them that the Second Army had crossed the Marne. He had not shaved for days, and his cheek was furrowed with the black groove of a bullet, but he wore a shining monocle. On his advice Reed and Dunn went to general headquarters and, after waiting two hours, in company with four British correspondents who had also made their way illegally into

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the lines, saw the Provost-Marshal. To their amazement, he lectured them sharply, said he could have them put in a dungeon for three years, and held the six of them for the night. In the morning he turned them over to a chief of gendarmes, with the order that they were to be sent by slow stages to Tours, where they would be released. At Tours they were compelled to promise not to attempt to reach the front again.

The experience, though disappointing, had had its rewarding moments, and Reed found the inactivity of Paris less tolerable than before. He thought of going back to Italy, and thence to Austria and Germany, but at the last moment he decided to make a brief visit to England. At Calais the shops and moving-picture houses were open, and the streets were crowded with soldiers, sailors, and the people of the town. Lonely, Reed picked up an acquaintance with a Socialist, and together they went to an all-night cafe to talk with the soldiers. The Socialist asked a group of men why they were fighting. "Because France was invaded," said one. "But the Germans say Germany was invaded," the Socialist pointed out. "That is true," said the soldier. "Perhaps we were both invaded."

When he reached London, Reed felt, having left a Paris only recently freed from the threat of siege, that the city was quite unaffected by the war. "The great gray town," he wrote, "still pours its roaring streams along the Strand and Oxford Street and Piccadilly; endless lines of omnibuses and taxicabs and carriages pass; in the morning the clerks go down to the city in their carefully-brushed silk hats and thread-bare frock coats,—and the amazing London bobbie embodies in his uplifted hand the dignity and precedent of the Empire. At night the theaters and restaurants are going full blast thronged with an apparently inexhaustible supply of nice young men in faultless evening dress, and beautiful women; along Leicester Square and Piccadilly press the same thousands and thousands of girls, and the hundreds of slim young men with painted lips, which yearly grow to be more characteristic of London streets. The same ghastly ragged men rise up out of the gutter to open your carriage door; the same bums slouch along the benches in Hyde Park."

But there was a difference. For one thing there were the posters everywhere: "Your King and Country Need You. Enlist for the Duration of War. England Needs a Million." They were even on private cars, and once he saw a huge luxurious motor, two liveried men on the front seat, a bloated, silk-hatted broker in the tonneau, and on the back "Lord Kitchener Wants More Men."

Then there were the soldiers, the officers in the Piccadilly crowd, the territorials drilling in Hyde Park, and—of especial interest—the volunteers. Lord Kitchener's appeal had, at the end of September, brought forth six hundred thousand men. "It is magnificent," Reed wrote, "and infinitely depressing. This patriotism—what a humanly fine, stupid instinct gives birth to it, the sacrifices for an ideal, the self-immolation for something greater than self. Generation after generation surging up to the guns to be shot to death for an ideal so extremely vague that they never know what they are fighting for. Ask one of these recruits what England is to him and you will see that it is nothing but a name and a feeling. One of the most widespread accusations hurled at the Mexican revolutionists by virtuous Americans was that they didn't know what they were fighting for, and the English know even less what they are fighting for than the Mexicans."

He had had many lessons in the power of patriotism, and he was not blind to the nobility to be found in even the vaguest idealism, but he was also conscious, as he walked about London, that other forces had helped to give Kitchener his volunteers. The Women's Patriotic League claimed one hundred thousand members, each of whom refused to receive any man not in uniform whose age and condition would permit him to serve in the army. Committees of society women stood in front of the National Gallery handing white feathers to civilians who passed by. Popular actresses in music halls singled out men in the audience and asked them why they did not enlist. Moreover, the paralysis of business at the outbreak of the war had thrown thousands of men out of work, and neither jobs nor relief would be given these men if they were of the age for service. Some firms discharged all men eligible for the army and filled their places with older ones. Others promised to help their employes' families if they would enlist and otherwise to discharge them. "It was really conscription," Reed realized, "conscription hiding under a pleasanter name, as has always been England's way—conscription ready to appear in its true colors the minute recruiting fell off."

FUNDAMENTALLY, it seemed to him, the masses of people were not interested in the war. They were not much concerned about the invasion of Belgium, and the German peril, so terrifyingly portrayed by the press, still seemed to them remote. They were beginning to be disturbed by British losses, and two months of propaganda had had an effect, but in the factory towns of the north and west, where business in munitions and army equipment had brought prosperity, the people were more interested in football scores and moving pictures than in the war.

It was the aristocracy, Reed came to believe, that wanted the war and was forcing it upon the rest of the country. "We in America," he wrote, "have long believed that the British upper classes were doomed, that their vitality was gone; and our final proof was the bridling of the House of Lords and the triumph of Liberalism. And now, like a waking lion, the British aristocracy crushes our teeming ant-hill with a blow of its paw, and shows us again, contemptuously, a servile England split into classes, where every man knows his place. Here stands erect what we thought was dead—the stupid, sterile, gorgeous Imperial idea."

For Reed, Lord Kitchener embodied that idea: "Kitchener of Khartoum is absolute ruler of England—Bloody Kitchener, the most complete expression of an imperial policy which has consisted in blowing men from the mouths of cannon in order to civilize them. There is something revolting about Kitchener, the cold, the merciless, the efficient—the very Prussian ideal of a military man." It was Kitchener who was making all England into a war-machine as efficient as the Kaiser's. He controlled the telephone, the telegraph, the mails. He had cowed the press. The English knew only what he wanted them to know. He had sacrificed Belgium for the sake of England, and, to save England, his will had held the French army firm. Through him the aristocracy ruled the country. The public school boy—"that peculiar, inhuman breed of aristocrat, as pestilential as the Prussian Junker"—was in the saddle.

The war was giving conservative England its opportunity. It was a fashionable war, with benefit concerts and receptions, at which social distinctions were carefully observed. It was true that the upper classes not only supported the war with social influence and forced their tenants and employes to enlist; they also sent their sons. But their sons went, in this great battle for democracy, as leaders. A rich American who had lived in England for twenty-five years wrote down for Reed the names of the leading families in his part of the country. Then he looked up the local regiment in the army list; almost every officer bore one of those names.

The aristocracy was fighting for survival, and it was ready to crush opposition with the utmost ruthlessness. But, Reed saw to his disappointment, there was no opposition worth crushing. He had expected much from the intelligent, politically-conscious working-class of England, but the workers there seemed as docile as those in France. The Socialists, after a few mass meetings at the outset, had subsided. The intellectuals, with one or two honorable but impotent exceptions, were helping to create the myth of the German beast. Only a handful of Liberal and Laborite politicians had dared oppose the war, and they had been crushed.

The aristocrats wanted position, power, and prestige. The business men wanted, quite simply, the crushing of German trade. These two groups, a little minority of men who knew what they were after, overcame the inertia of the great majority. The business men were determined that, wherever Germany had secured a commercial foothold by superior manufacture and better salesmanship, English goods must be established. German property in England was confiscated, and German patents were invoked. A cam-

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paign began to induce the public to buy only goods made in England, and stores that had German stocks scratched off the German labels and substituted their own. The British fleet virtually blockaded Italy, Holland, Norway, and Sweden, to prevent goods from reaching Germany, and did not hesitate to ruin Swedish industry in the process or starve the Dutch people.

REED had called it a traders' war, and it did not take much study of England's policy to prove how right he had been. For fifteen years England had been seeking to isolate Germany, just as Russia, her ally, had worked for the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Germany's only support. "On my map," Reed wrote, "there is a small collection of islands off the northern coast of France, isolated from the Continent by a channel, and together a trifle larger than the State of Ohio. From there stretch the wires that control a tenth of the earth's surface. England's guns squat in the mouth of the Mediterranean; Egypt and Malta are hers; she grips the Red Sea, sucks the blood from all India, menaces half a billion human beings from Hong Kong, owns all Australia, half North America, and half of Africa. The fleets of the world salute her ensign on every commanding headland, and her long gray battleships steam unopposed from sea to sea. England's word is said in every council, conference, treaty. She is the great intriguer, sitting like a spider in the web of nations and disposing of them to her benefit. And it was England's will that Germany should be destroyed."

He would have been a poor Socialist if any of this had surprised him, but he could not help being shocked by the blatant hypocrisy of the Empire. The press was trying to popularize Russia, talking about the gentle Cossacks, the end of pogroms, and the growth of civil liberty, though members of Parliament spoke openly about the war with Russia to follow the extermination of Germany. Much was made of England's championship of treaty obligations and her befriending of smaller nations, though England's bloody record was spread on every history book. The very England that butchered the people of India, China, and the Soudan, that had driven the natives of Tasmania into a sea-girt corner of the island and slaughtered them like rabbits, shrieked about German atrocities, and the England that had taken the Elgin Marbles and filled its museums with stolen property from Egypt and Greece, called upon the world to witness the iniquity of German looting.

He had no illusions about the superiority of Germany to England, but he hated and feared the monstrous hypocrisy of imperial policy. He saw clearly the danger of the British campaign of lies and distortions, which was doubly a menace because of British control of the sources of news. The article that he wrote in England—an article that the *Metropolitan* never printed—was a warning to America. "Do not be deceived," he cried, "by talk about democracy and liberty. This is not a crusade against militarism, but a scramble for spoils. It is not our war."

And, despite the ignominious capitulation of the Socialists, he saw signs that the people of the Empire might yet see through the vast deception. Riots in India, revolts in South Africa, and Sinn Fein demonstrations in Ireland hinted that the widely advertised loyalty of the colonies might be less strong than the press pretended to believe. Even in England the war was generally unpopular, and there was some bitterness. "It may be," he wrote, "that when the cold days come and the toll of wounded lengthens and the continual slackening of trade grips England with poverty that labor in England will see its great opportunity, and that when this war is done there will be no more Empire." It was only hope, but it kept Reed from utter depression during his weeks in London.

AFTER a brief stay in Paris, Reed went on to Berlin, and immediately applied for permission to go to the trenches. It took a long time for arrangements to be made, and meanwhile there was nothing to do but stand around the hotel bars and drink with the other correspondents. There were concerts, which Reed enjoyed, but at one of them an actor recited a poem of hate against the Allies, and all the pleasure in Haydn and Mozart vanished. Everywhere were evidences of the efficiency of the German war-machine, and he was weary of war-machines. The blunt aggressiveness of the German leaders was only slightly less irritating than the hypocrisy of British statesmen, and the brutality of some German officers to their men was intolerable. Many of the reporters, he discovered, were privately sympathetic to Germany, though they were already shaping their dispatches to match the pro-Ally sentiments of the editorial columns of their papers. For himself, he could discover no basis for preference.

It was encouraging, after all he had seen of the vacillation of Socialist leaders in France and Great Britain, to talk with Karl Liebknecht. The Socialist deputy, leader of the handful who had dared to vote against war appropriations, seemed diffident, almost shy. He played with a paper cutter as he talked. His dark, round face was pallid in the light of a green-shaded desk lamp. His mouth, under the bristling mustache, was calm, and his brown eyes were gentle. Reed asked him if he stood by his attitude of opposition to the war. "What else," said Liebknecht, "can a Socialist do?"

At last came permission to go to Lille and then to the trenches. Senator Beveridge, Robert Dunn and Ernest Poole were in the group. They rode through German France, where, under the surveillance of German soldiers, French peasants were working in the fields. "Don't imagine," he wrote, "that German soldiers are a cruel, arrogant race. They have done many admirable things. I am sure that some of these little northern French towns were never so clean, so intelligently organized. Everywhere they have reopened schools and churches; they have reestablished local institutions and local charities; they have scoured whole towns, lighted every house with electricity, placed up-to-date hospitals, served by the finest doctors in the world, at the free disposal of the humblest citizen." But the people were a conquered people, filled with bitterness and hatred, with their sons in the French army and all their hopes centered in a French victory.

At Lille the entire party stayed in the best hotel—at the expense, they assumed, of the German government. Actually, they afterwards learned, the bill was paid by the city. Soldiers, officers, and guests of the army were lodged in private houses and hotels, whose owners were permitted to charge a stated amount. The account was paid by a signed order, and the landlord collected his money from the city treasury. Direct war contributions amounted to two million francs a month. The Germans had confiscated food, leather, rubber, cloth, and copper. The population lived on bitter black bread, made half of bad flour and half of potatoes. Twelve hostages, including the mayor's son, were kept under guard.

And yet Reed found the German soldiers —and most of the officers, for that matter— friendly, decent people. The soldiers were jovial and childlike, with little animosity against the French. Reed could easily believe the story of the Christmas truce, when the men on both sides, in defiance of orders, ceased firing. But, unfortunately, it was just as easy to believe that when the truce was over, the firing was resumed. It was just as it had been in the French and British armies—no hatred for the enemy, no sense of anything to be gained by the war, no ability to give a reason for fighting—and yet complete devotion to the business of killing.

REED wanted to see actual fighting: perhaps it would help to explain the mystery; at least he could say that he had seen war at first hand. The entire party was led to one of the quieter sectors. They could see both the French and German trenches and could hear the constant sound of firing. There was not a human being in sight, though within three hundred yards a thousand Germans were eating, drinking, sleeping, and shooting, and, two hundred yards beyond them a thousand Frenchmen were doing the same things. When they were back at the automobiles, their guide asked them if they were satisfied. Dunn promptly said he was not, and Reed joined him. One of the officers telephoned the general in command of the Second Bavarian Army Corps, and they were given permission to enter the trenches in a more active sector that night.

They had lunch with the general at his

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headquarters at Comines. Thousands of soldiers, having spent their three days in the trenches, were resting in the great barracks, a converted factory, in the city. As the correspondents left, they met column after column of heavily laden motor and horse trucks and long lines of slouching, mud-soaked soldiers. They came to Houthem, where recruits were given their final training within range of the French cannon. The road on which they passed was sporadically shelled, and by the time they came to the battery they were to inspect, the explosions seemed unpleasantly close. The captain of the battery was cordial and reassuring. He exhibited his biggest gun, and gave the word to his men. There was a flat roar; flame and gray haze belched forth; and the whistling scream of the roaring shell rose and dwindled. In the dugout a soldier, with a telephone receiver strapped to his ears and an open novel in his lap, reported to the captain that French cannon were being moved into place to shell the battery. Outside, the captain pointed to a French plane hovering high above them in the attempt to find their position, and they saw two German monoplanes rise and drive the scout away.

Some of the correspondents thought they had seen enough, and their guide's account of the dangers of going into the trench convinced them that they had better return to Lille. Reed was inclined to agree with them, but Dunn insisted that at least they reconnoiter. They went to field headquarters, where the colonel welcomed them with cognac and beer. After supper, with plenty of Munchener, Reed decided to join Dunn, and the two of them left the others with the colonel and his beer.

They trudged on in the rain, talking with Lieutenant Riegel in fragmentary French and German. The French batteries were silent, but the German guns roared steadily. Reed visualized the great switchboard singing and humming in the kitchen of brigade headquarters and the quivering miles of telephone wire that led from where muddy men with night-glasses watched the French lines under the blinding glare of rockets. Smoothly the great machine functioned, calm questions and answers, deliberate judgments, the word passing from trench to gun, from gun to trench, from Houthem to Comines, to Lille, to Brussels, perhaps to Berlin.

They passed a field kitchen, and the two men tending it cried "Gruss Gott" like the simple Bavarian peasants they were. In the darkness they stumbled against men moving along in the rain, relieved artillery. On one stretch of the road rifle bullets spat in the mud, and just after they had passed there was a burst of machine-gun fire. They walked thirty feet apart. "We lose about twenty men a night here," Lieutenant Riegel commented.

IN the stone-vaulted wine cellar of a ruined chateau the major in command of the trench played the chateau's grand piano, miraculously unscathed when German artillery had pounded at the handful of English who had held the place a month or two before. He had been on a concert tour in America, talked with them eagerly about the country, and gave them beer.

The approach trench, flooded when a shot hit the bank of the Ypres canal, was impassable, and they walked, again spread out, through an open beet field. Bullets came close enough to splash them with mud, but they reached the approach trench beyond the break and scrambled into it. Struggling on, staggering, falling, thrusting their arms to the shoulder in the wet slime of the sides, they came at last to the trench that stretched the entire length of the German lines.

The lieutenant gave them Munchener and then took them outside. Men stood shoulder to shoulder, shielded by thin plates of steel, each pierced with a loophole through which the rifle lay. Sodden with the drenching rain, their bodies crushing into the oozy mud, they stood thigh deep in thick brown water, and spent eight hours out of every twenty-four in shooting. The officer ordered

VICTORY

Drawings by Kerr Eby, from his exhibition, "The Tragedy of War," at the Frederick Keppel & Co. Gallery

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a man to send up rockets, and in their light Reed could see the opposing trench, a black gash pricked with rifle-flame. Only a little way off lay the huddled, blue-coated bodies of the French who had been slain in an attempted advance of the week before. They were slowly sinking into the mud.

Suddenly the French guns began, far down the line. The firing swept along and began directly opposite them. Diabolical whistlings laced the sky, and shrapnel crackled overhead. The German howitzers went into action, and Reed could see the flames leap as their shells struck. The ground shook. They staggered into the lieutenant's dugout. "You're safer in the trench," he explained. "But it doesn't last long," he continued, and just then the noise chopped suddenly off, and the rifle-fire sounded like crickets in a pasture.

They played poker with the officers in the dugout, and listened, over the telephone wire, as the major in the chateau wine-cellar played Chopin waltzes. As they came out of the dugout, before daybreak, the lieutenant called a soldier and took his rifle. "Would you like to have a shot?" he asked. Tense after their night in the trenches, they laughed feverishly, and both of them fired in the general direction of France. They left the trench with the men going off duty. The firing had dwindled away, and they felt almost safe. Many of the soldiers were bent over with rheumatism, and a few had to be carried on stretchers. They were silent with the silence of desperately weary men. Suddenly there was a scream, and, in the light of the lieutenant's pocket lamp, they saw a man seized, bound and gagged. His eyes were wide and staring, and his shoulders twitched convulsively. He was quite mad. And then, as they were nearly back to the chateau, they heard a humming deep chorus of hushed voices. It was the thousand men from Comines, washed, dried, fed and rested, marching in for their three days in the trenches.

Neither Dunn nor Reed said much; they had, as Reed recorded, a good deal to think about. Reed had seen at last the actual conduct of the war. The experience gave him the material for the one first-rate article that grew out of his five months in western Europe. He had entered sympathetically into the emotions of the fighting men in the trenches. He took no pleasure in the experience, as he had in sharing the lot of La Tropa, but at least he had seen something that could be honestly recorded without comment or interpretation. This was war, the full brutal, mechanical force of it. He had felt the horror of death and the horror of military life. The fighting not merely lacked glamor; it was starkly terrible. But Reed could have accepted the horror if he had not sensed so fully the futility. He wanted to say to the soldiers of both sides, "This is not your war."

(*The second of these five chapters will appear next week.*)

Correspondence

What Sinclair Told Thomas

To The New Masses:

Sunday night, November 17, Upton Sinclair debated Norman Thomas at Mecca Temple. The subject was the EPIC Plan as a solution of our present economic difficulties. Mr. Sinclair said that he had started his organization because he did not want a Hitler to come to power in America. He felt that the unemployed were the heart of the problem, because they caused a great expense for the taxpayers and increased the reservoir of workers and thus depressed wages. His proposal was to take these unemployed workers out of competition with the employed and thus decrease the tax burden. He would do this, he said, by letting the unemployed run their own industries and operate their own farms, and then consume their products themselves.

Mr. Sinclair's approach is essentially that of an upper middle-class taxpayer: he doesn't want to be spending more money for government relief. Similarly, his solution is upper-middle-class: it stops with a consideration of what affects his own pocketbook. As Mr. Thomas correctly pointed out, Hitler has decreased the unemployed in Germany (by forced labor-camps and by drafting workers for the manufacture of munitions): but there is still a crisis in Germany. No, Mr. Sinclair's plan is no solution, because it attacks only a result of the capitalistic system and not the system itself.

He claimed that his plan was more practical than that of the Socialists or Communists. He said they had not captured the "citadels of power" while he had rolled up over 800,000 votes in the state of California. It might be well to point out that neither had Mr. Sinclair, despite his vote, succeeded in getting power. He cannot even justify his plan on the basis of opportunism (which is the genesis and issue of it).

Two of the questions asked Mr. Sinclair during the question period after the rebuttals, clarified his position as an opportunist. The first question was, "Why did you, as candidate for the EPIC Party, not take a stand against the use of vigilantes in the California General Strike?"

In replying, Mr. Sinclair first traced back his position in the past. Then he said that he *had* denounced the use of repression in a speech in San Francisco. Nevertheless, a consultation of magazine files since the debate reveals that Mr. Sinclair was not listed along with Leo Gallagher, Charles Erskine Scott Wood and Sara Bard Field, who were continuously protesting against the suppression of workers' rights. If Mr. Sinclair said anything he said it only once, and inconspicuously: he did not make it an important part of his campaign. In other words, he was not introducing anything to arouse middle-class prejudice; he was a politician after all.

The second question—and its answer—were even more revealing. "Mr. Sinclair, why is there no union label in your pamphlet which is being put on sale in this audience?" Mr. Sinclair hemmed and hawed. Then he said that he had known the printer a long time, that this printer had trusted him when he was broke, that he did not have a union shop but did pay union wages. It will be recalled that Father Coughlin, when asked the same question, also defended himself by saying that his printer paid union wages.

This is not the Sinclair who wrote *The Jungle, The Goose-Step, The Brass Check* and *Boston.* This is an aging, confused man who has lost touch with the labor movement and is misleading people with proposals which do not attack the root of our trouble. Once Mr. Sinclair knew better.

New York City. Jerome Mellquist.

A Letter About a Typewriter

To The New Masses:

We're writing this to ask you folks up north to help us get a typewriter. We are a group of workers trying to better our conditions and we need financial help. Our conditions here at the Fulton Bag and Cotton mills are getting worse and worse every day. On top of all the other things we been forced to suffer, just three weeks ago our bosses saw fit to raise our working load and stretch us out more. We need to issue leaflets explaining the reason for this.

Our wages here are mighty low. The Fulton Bag and Cotton mill is a bag mill that makes all sorts of bags from sugar sacks to cowfeed sacks and hundreds of other kinds. Benjamin and Norman Elsas, both sons of the founder of this mill, are running things roughshod over us. They own six other mills scattered through the south just like this one.

They have an elaborate staff of bosses, overseers, second hands, and straw bosses. They own the houses we live in. They own the nursery our kids go to. They own everything—even the churches we go to. Because of the many bosses, they know practically everything we do. If a worker and his wife so much as have personal quarrels the bosses hear about it and fire one of them. Then they have to beg like humble dogs to get back on in the mill.

The workers complain and growl about their miseries and troubles but don't yet know that they can get better conditions if they organize strongly. The mill, by firing all union hands and all workers who even talk to union men, has made the workers fear the United Textile Workers Union just as much as they value their job.

We've got to tell them through leaflets and we need a typewriter to be able to carry on the work.

We call on you to help us who can't help ourselves financially. Funds can be sent to us in care of The League for Southern Labor, 304 West 58th Street, New York.

Atlanta. Tessie Tennelle.

Letters in Brief

E. Rymer of the Federation of Children's Organizations advises us that classes in puppetry, photography, handicrafts, dramatics, nature study, painting and designing and sports are being offered each Saturday, 50 East 13th Street, New York City.

W. E. Deppe of New York City encloses a copy of a letter which he has written to the Society of Automotive Engineers calling attention to the danger of carbon monoxide poisoning due to the use of "lead dopes" in fuels to increase motor car speed. He asserts that many cases of falling asleep at the wheel and of inability to act quickly can be traced to carbon monoxide poisoning.

Conrad Komorowski, acting chairman of the Provisional Committee for Cuba, writes to appeal to friends of Cuban independence for funds to bring Juan Marinello, well known scholar who has just served a prison term for opposing dictatorship to the United States where he will lecture.

C. H. Hoffman of the Philadelphia Workers School writes that the Sunday Forums of the school are now being held at the Grand Fraternity Hall, 1626 Arch Street. Forum programs may be obtained from Hoffman whose address is 62 North Eighth Street.

William Burstcher of Santa Monica, Cal., wants New Masses to do its best to convince a skeptical friend of his that *Peasants,* Soviet film, was produced in the Soviet Union and not in the United States as the friend asserts. The United States Department of Commerce can supply the proof.

F. Miller of Mansfield, Ohio; Joseph Schulte of Brooklyn; and M. Goldman have all called our attention to an error in the comparison of statistics between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. in the Nov. 12 issue. The increase for the U.S.A. for electrical power output should have been +355%, not +38% as the article stated.

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REVIEW AND COMMENT

Escape or Suicide?

THE STREET I KNOW, by Harold E. Stearns. Lee Furman, Inc., New York. $2.75.

THERE is a story which I don't believe but have always liked about a young student of philosophy, years ago, who wrote a thesis proving, by a magnificent chain of reasoning, that life was fundamentally purposeless and futile. When he had finished it, carried away by his own logic, he shot himself. Some time later a friend, going over the manuscript for publication, discovered a flaw in his argument which upset the whole structure and pointed towards the conclusion that life was really rich in promise and far from futile. I don't remember whether or not the friend added an appendix to the published volume, pointing out the error. He may have done something like that. It was too late, anyway, to bring the matter to the attention of the author.

I have often thought that there is a vague sort of parallel between this story and the career of Harold Stearns. Up to the year 1921, his career seems to have been neither particularly glorious nor inglorious, but he must have been assimilating ideas and peculiarly rancorous ones, for in that year *Civilization in the United States* appeared, a symposium which he edited and for whose general tone he must have been responsible, since there was visible in the essays of its separate authors a unanimity of opinion that was remarkable. The authors included Lewis Mumford, Ring Lardner, George Soule, Hendrik Van Loon, Van Wyck Brooks, Thorne Smith —perhaps as odd an assemblage as any symposium ever got together—and their subjects ranged through Art, Schools and Colleges, the Theater, the Small Town, the City, to the Literary Life, Advertising, and Sports. One by one they spoke, and with a terrible finality; and their consensus was that life in America, in all its branches, was futile, sterile, unimaginative—in a word, lousy.

It was a bitter, tendentious, quarrelsome book; there was no mincing of words. Artists were described as being "turned into machines," existence as "joyless and colorless," business men as being "incompetent and imbecile"; our "material civilization" existed only as a symbol of intellectual failure. There were references to "emotional, esthetic and sexual starvation," to "intellectual torpor," to the "sharp dichotomy (does this mark the beginning of the vogue for this word in modern criticism?) between preaching and practice" of moral codes. In effect, it gave the authority of a jury-verdict to the indictments that *Main Street, The Waste Land* and a hundred other books had made or were soon to make against contemporary life. It was undoubtedly the most powerful single influence behind the Great Exodus of young American artists to France that took place during the years immediately following its appearance. And it is easy to see why there was nothing left for Mr. Stearns to do, having finished editing a book that pronounced America to be uninhabitable, but to leave the place flat, forever.

He did just that, in July, 1921, and it was at the time a perfect gesture. It was also, for Mr. Stearns at least, a form of literary suicide. Whatever he might have done if he had stayed in this country, the fact is that in ten years of life abroad he produced precisely nothing. I think myself that this fact alone is a significant commentary on the value of flight or escape as an artistic doctrine.

Around here, though, the comparison between the philosophy student and Mr. Stearns begins to lose point. In the first place, of course, he didn't shoot himself. His was a subtler form of suicide, and he came back to write a book, the present one, about the strange afterworld he had been inhabiting. Moreover, there is still a question as to how far the movement he helped set in motion was a mistake. For Mr. Stearns himself it was a disastrous one, but I think there were few who "fled" so arbitrarily, or into so great a void, as he did. Indeed, a great many people who went abroad at that time (myself, for one) had never heard of Harold Stearns until they got to Paris, and very little of the whole theory of Exile, either. Once the movement got under way, it continued of its own momentum—and it is well to remember that France had inducements of its own to offer, quite apart from the negative advantage of not being America.

On the question of whether or not it was all a mistake, I must speak as a participant in the trek, and it is difficult for anyone to determine if any part of his past experience was definitely good or bad for him. As a result of it, certainly, we were all considerably delayed in getting down to our real work, chiefly because of the holiday mood that prevailed and the general removal from reality. It bred in us false attitudes, towards Art, towards ourselves, particularly towards Non-Artists, that we have had a hard time getting over. Worst of all, the mere passage of time brought us back here, when we did come back, so involved in the obligations that inevitably accumulate around a man as he grows older, that the pursuit of art was seriously hampered, while the recalcitrant attitudes we had developed made even the ordinary workaday compromises difficult. The result was, in many cases, despair, and the abandonment of all artistic effort.

On the other hand, I can't help feeling that a couple of years in a different country, operating under an entirely different set of customs, was a good thing for us all—or at least for those who made an effort to conform to the new customs—in developing elasticity of outlook and background for

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questioning the *status quo*. And though our "revolt," as I see it now, was an extremely egoistic and small-focused one, the amount of thrashing about that we did in the course of it must have helped open a way for broader inquiries to come later. I will leave it for someone else to add up these credits and debits and find a correct balance in the matter.

All this as a sort of appendix to Mr. Stearns' new book, an autobiography, which oddly enough, though it covers methodically all the rest of his life from birth to the present day, omits all consideration except the barest factual one of the period spoken of, of his place in it, of the motives involved —of, in short, the very set of events that justify him now in writing an autobiography at all. He details his childhood, his school and college days, his life in New York and Chicago afterward, working on newspapers, editing the Dial. There is a not very informative chapter about the getting together of *Civilization in the United States*. And then suddenly, plop, he is in Paris, and getting a job on the Paris edition of the Chicago Tribune as racing expert, and then losing that job and getting another on the Daily Mail, and then losing that one . . . and from then on the progression is downward, through sickness, poverty, near-blindness to, eventually, his return to this country some three years ago and his attempt to rehabilitate himself here.

But why he went to France, why he stayed, why he thinks others went there and what they got out of it, what he thinks of the whole movement his name is so inextricably mixed up with—these questions go all unanswered. In fact, though it seems incredible, about the only comment Mr. Stearns makes on the period is: "I don't think I reflected much on the so-called expatriate problem, especially with respect to American writers . . . it always impressed me as an irrelevant thing. . . . It is the *spiritual* struggle every writer has to go through: it does not much matter, when he comes to go through with that struggle, where he is or even what language he speaks —and certainly not terribly much what the economic system is under which he lives and writes . . . etc., etc." Which is about as near to a categorical denial of everything Mr. Stearns stood for ten years ago as could be imagined. It almost looks as if he wanted quietly to disavow the whole business.

At any rate, the omission pretty nearly ruins the book as a document of contemporary history. What remains is a rather dreary journal of a man who wrote a book; who knew, not too well, a number of famous people; who lived in France for some years and went through a certain amount of hardship there; and who, finally, is now trying to reestablish himself in this country. And his book lacks the insight, the sense of human perception that is needed to vitalize such a book, and show the linkages between the one case and the common case, and so make it valuable reading in this year.

For the plain fact is that Harold Stearns is still interested, primarily and exclusively, only in himself. Even the pressure of his own sufferings (and they were at times apparently severe) failed to press out any clear philosophic feeling; and though there are moving passages in the final chapters about his recent experiences here, there is still a kind of complaining piteousness about them that chills the reader's sympathy. He lived for a time in a poor quarter of Newark—and felt sorry for himself because the slums of America had no "lift" to them, like the slums of Paris; he saw men in breadlines in Times Square, and was led into some pretty sophomoric talk about the "un-American" aspects of Communism—throughout, his preoccupation was only with himself, and the main mood of the book is an almost terrifying lack of fellow-feeling, of the ability to see, through his own plight, the plight of others, of human understanding.

Perhaps that was the mood that inspired all of us expatriates.

ROBERT M. COATES.

An Epic of Collectivization

SEEDS OF TOMORROW, by Mikhail Sholokhov. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. $2.50.

SEEDS OF TOMORROW is one of the novels that make us realize how life is being changed in the Soviet Union. Karl Radek has hailed it as vastly superior to its predecessor, *And Quiet Flows the Don*. The majority of American critics, it is safe to predict, will not like it anywhere near so well. The truth is, I suspect, that generations of Russian novelists had prepared us to appreciate *And Quiet Flows the Don,* which innumerable critics compared—quite justly—with Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. *Seeds of Tomorrow,* however, deals with the new Russia, which we find harder to understand. It is, as Radek calls it, the epic of collectivization, a subject about which most of us know vastly little. In the Soviet Union, on the other hand, every detail of Sholokhov's novel is fresh and significant and comprehensible.

One gathers from Radek's article, published in *Literature of the Peoples of the U.S.S.R.,* a special number of Voks Illustrated Almanac, that the critics of the Soviet Union were a little impatient with *And Quiet Flows the Don*. They recognized the power of this vast panorama of the Cossacks in war, peace and revolution, but its events seemed a little remote from them. The Soviet world was changing so rapidly that they and perhaps the vast majority of readers were less interested in the decade from 1910 to 1920 than they were in the new decade that was beginning, the nineteen-thirties.

Sholokhov, though probably he knew well enough why it was necessary for him, as an artist, to tell the story of the life in which he had his own roots, could see the critics' point. He, too, was aware of the importance of the battle for collectivization and of its potentialities as a literary theme. Like other Soviet authors, he refused to accept the dictum that only what is dead can come to life in art. He wanted to portray the present and influence the future. But he was wise enough not to try any short-cuts. "Some of our writers," Radek states, "unable to fix on their canvas the stormy flow of events, have tried to grasp life by means of the photograph or by superficial essays. Sholokhov took another course: he gave a large canvas of the great struggle for collectivization in richly profound artistic imagery."

That is the significance of *Seeds of Tomorrow*. Sholokhov realized, on the one hand, that a novel of collectivization could be built only out of what he knew and felt and understood, what, in short, he had assimilated. And, on the other hand, he realized that distortion and falsification would be quite as disastrous to the effectiveness of his book in the campaign for collectivization as they would to its literary merit. He had to immerse himself in the life he was describing so completely that the book would have the accuracy of an expert diagnosis and at the same time would be the concretely realistic story of living human beings.

The novel is laid in the village of Gremyachy Log in the Don Valley in the year 1930. The central character is Davidov, an ex-sailor and a machinist in the Putilov works, who is sent to Gremyachy by the Communist Party to expedite collectivization. His task is nothing less than to change the peasant psychology that centuries have shaped. Not only do the kulaks fight collectivization with every resource they have; even the poor-

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est peasants, those who know how much they will gain from the kolkhoz, have to struggle against their own impulses. There is Kondrat Maidannikov, for example, a loyal supporter of the collective farm, who admits to Davidov that it breaks his heart to let his cattle become part of the common stock. And then there are the extremists, men like Nagulnov, fine, idealistic revolutionaries who are so eager that they antagonize everyone and endanger the whole enterprise. Against all this Davidov has to struggle. Davidov is no superman, but he has unlimited courage and persistence and at the end, though most of his problems are yet to be solved, the reader is confident that he will win.

The more one makes the effort to immerse oneself in the novel, the more plausible it seems that the Soviet critics are right in regarding *Seeds of Tomorrow* as a better book than *And Quiet Flows the Don*. The people are just as human and the incidents just as dramatic—the slaughtering of the livestock, Nagulnov's trial, the raid on the granary and Davidov's ploughing. *And Quiet Flows the Don* is one of the strong, simple novels that deal with the stark realities of life and death. But so, one comes to realize, is *Seeds of Tomorrow*. The conditions under which men live and die are different and much less familiar, but there is magnificent strength here and the strength is being used for the sake of the future.

Every sensitive writer feels the pressure that his age exerts upon him. No writer is free: he can run away, but only by paying a price. In an era of rapid and conscious change, pressure becomes more explicit; it is not something that the writer vaguely feels but something definite and clear-cut. Under such pressure lesser talents crumble: writers adopt easy devices, become mere photographers or political teachers. But such pressure cannot damage a great talent; in fact, it makes it flourish. That is what has happened to Sholokhov. *And Quiet Flows the Don* showed that he belonged with the great Russian writers of the past. *Seeds of Tomorrow* shows that he belongs with the great Russian writers of the future. The past could not have nourished him indefinitely, but the future can.

GRANVILLE HICKS.

Farmers in Rebellion

The Green Corn Rebellion, by William Cunningham. Vanguard Press. $2.

OUT in Oklahoma during the few fat pre-depression years the countryside seemed to be full of "former Reds" who were doing pretty well for themselves. Those "former Reds" had, most of them, been active in the Farmer Labor Reconstruction League which had elected Jack Walton to the governorship. The League had been made up of Socialists, the Farmers' Union, the State Federation of Labor, the railroad Brotherhoods. Once Walton got into office he tricked and betrayed his real supporters and was, finally, impeached.

The leaders and the big shots of the Walton-League days turned to business and to politics and, capitalizing on their one-time prominence and claims to devotion to the interests of the farmers and workers, got their hand on slices of prosperity or grabbed at crumbs of political patronage and managed to "get by." They were, they assured each other and themselves, sort of waiting for the workers and farmers to catch up with their advanced points of view. When the working class was ready to stage another revolt they would be ready to act as leaders. Meanwhile they must eat.

Whenever a few of them gathered together to polish off a quart of coal-country corn liquor and bewail the backwardness of "the movement" they would remember and retell the stories of better and more lively days. One of the tales was of the Green Corn Rebellion of 1917; the attempt of a group of militant, fighting, patriot-harried farmers to stage an armed revolt against the war, a revolt which they dreamed would lead to the overthrow of capitalism in America.

It was during that Oklahoma period of corn-liquor drinking and cynical self-seeking that Cunningham came out of the state university. He heard the tales of the Green Corn Rebellion in the garbled versions offered in Oklahoma City by fellows who had had no part in it and who seemed to think there was something funny in the idea of a handful of Seminole county farmers rising in armed revolt against the war and everything it meant.

Cunningham had in him the feel of the countryside and the folks who had staged the Green Corn Rebellion. He'd been born out

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in the west end of Oklahoma before statehood.

He knew the farms, the small towns, the farmers, the people of the small towns of a region almost exactly like Seminole county. He couldn't quite join in the smiles of the city slickers, the wise guys, when they talked of the Green Corn fiasco. He kept remembering about the sort of folks who had made up the Working Class Union which staged the revolt.

Now, out of that sort of remembrance Bill has built his first novel. His knowledge of physical background, work, habits of living, thought processes of folks like the Green Corn rebels has enabled him to do a job that in many, in most, respects is fine, though there are faults. In a novel of wider scope he could have shown the relation of the Green Corn Rebellion to the whole sweep of agrarian unrest and revolt in the trans-Mississippi Middle West and specifically how the Green Corn rebels were the natural heirs of the old Oklahoma-Texas Tenant Farmers Union.

But there is one job he did very well. He has shown how revolt, rebellion, the joining together in organization, can enrich and widen lives which seem "destined to narrowness and meanness." Jim Tetley finds through his part in the rebellion things which are richer, more vivid, more profound than he could ever have found in becoming a "good farmer." The love affair in which he becomes involved sloughs-off what might have been sordid and, because of the understanding which grew in him through his activity in the rebellion, it takes on tragic dignity.

Such scenes as that where Jim goes to Oklahoma City and encounters such city wonders as a hotel lobby, elevators and a cafeteria Cunningham manages to make both authentic and significant. The sway-backed horse yarns of Mack McGee put the real flavor of American humor into the tale. And they don't go in as folksy touches; they belong because old Mack was the kind of a stiff the others would depend on for just such homely humor.

By understanding real people, by writing of them in their own terms Bill Cunningham has built a fine novel. In future jobs it may be expected that he will hold to that understanding and go beyond it. Go beyond it by showing how such events as the Green Corn Rebellion are part of the whole flow and flux of working-class struggle.

KARL PRETSHOLD.

The Bourgeois Revolution

DANTON, by Hermann Wendel. Yale University Press, New Haven. 356 *pages.* $3.75.

THE ANGEL OF THE ASSASSINATION, by Joseph Shearing. Smith and Haas. New York. 336 pages. $2.75.

MARX, viewing the French Revolution as a whole, pays full tribute to the "heroes as well as the parties" who, whatever their confusions, "achieved the task of their day—the liberation of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of modern bourgeois society." But most historians cannot write on that colossal upheaval without being bitterly partisan towards one or the other of the two great Jacobin leaders, Robespierre and Danton. That species of hero-worship is perhaps inevitably to be found in writers on great movements; what is interesting is that the preference indicated is bound to be a product of the historian's own social philosophy. For the Jacobin Club was not a unified group of men with the same objectives.

At first, of course, their common enemies made their irreconcilable differences seem unimportant until the Republic was established in September, 1792 by the Convention. The fight was against the aristocracy and the wealthy bourgeoisie who wanted the Revolution to call a halt at the constitutional monarchy, for now the road seemed clear for their free (capitalistic) amassing of wealth. But with the abolition of the monarchy and the ascendency of the Jacobin Club, the Republican parties were faced with their own internal contradictions.

The membership, in short, included varying degrees of middle-class opinion. The proletariat, as yet an unformed mass without self-consciousness, was of course unrepresented; and although it supplied the force behind the bloody activities of these years, its own interests were still, as Marx says, "coincident with those of the bourgeoisie" at that moment of history. Nothing is more incorrect than the notion propagated by the enemies of the Jacobins, that they were a ragamuffin lot. These men, Mr. Wendel reminds us, "included the elite of an educated and prosperous bourgeoisie, deputies of the National Assembly, writers, scientists, merchants, physicians, artists, and lawyers." Membership dues were the healthy sum of twenty-four livres a year.

How could there have failed to be conflict in such a governing body as this? There were: Danton's party,—moderates who wished now to discontinue the Terror and protect property; Hèbert's party,—negatives without any concrete program, and who were satisfied to demand more Terror and a propaganda for atheism; Roux's party,—who espoused an agrarian communism; Robespierre's party,—who held up (what was actually a reactionary) Utopian return-to-the-land as the economic solution. As the battle thickened about Danton and Robespierre, they simplified the issue by sending to the guillotine the smaller extreme groups. Then these two stood confronting each other: Danton, anxious to compromise and to insure the gains of the bourgeoisie,—Robespierre, speaking for the starving petty bourgeoisie. The former, accused of speculation and shady negotiation with the enemy, was able to silence his foes for a time; his vigorous personality and strong animal-spirits, his careless and expansive living—these insured his popularity. The latter, austere and impassive, depended only on the cold relentless logic of his dry speeches; he lived chastely as a Puritan, was unloved but feared.

But Danton had to go. To achieve the establishment of his present republic, the division of the land among the propertyless, Robespierre had to get rid of his bourgeois rival. He did. But his own solution was merely a Rousseauistic turning back of the clock, an impossible piece of over-simplified sentimentalism. Whether or not he be now judged worthy of his task, he stood nearest (for Marat was dead) to the crying needs of the masses. Within a few months of his triumph, however, the growing reaction swept him to the block too.

The bourgeois historian, therefore, is likely to be a Dantonist. Aulard, whose life work on the Revolution is generally considered in academic circles the most solid piece of scholarship on the movement, is an avowed admirer of Danton. His point of view being nationalistic, the class divisions of the struggle interest him little. Naturally, the magnetic son of the trading-class attracts him as one of the creators of France. His disciple, Mathiez, who shares esteem with him, nevertheless differs from him violently on the subject of the two leaders. For Mathiez, who was once a Communist, Robespierre is the great force, Danton a mere "bandit." And now Mr. Wendel, himself a reputable authority and a collector of Marx's writings on the Revolution, attempting objectively, falls a little between two stools.

Fully aware that the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie were worse off than ever under a Revolution that glorified the rights of property and unchecked capitalism, Mr. Wendel presents a full picture of the unrepresented masses and their sufferings. But he cannot avoid the spell of Danton's robust character, nor can he like the thin-lipped enemy of his hero. So that, giving with amazing clarity a full picture of 1789-94 with all its proletarian implications, he nonetheless voices, through emotional overtones, his affection for Danton. Danton had to be removed, yet he cannot help regretting it.

Still, this work is entirely worthy the attention of the general reader. Without pedantry, it gives a day-by-day account of those confused times in a style unexaggeratedly dramatic and abounding in flashes of biographical hints that heighten the whole picture. The book is something of a tour de force in its clarity and compactness.

Mr. Shearing's book, revealing more definitely bourgeois prejudices, is dealt with here only because it permits consideration of the third great Jacobin leader, Marat. The "Angel" is of course, Charlotte Corday. The episode which in Mr. Wendel's book is neatly disposed of in a paragraph, is here spun out to novel-length. Mr. Shearing's

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grace and charm hardly make up for inaccuracies and misinterpretations to beautify the act of his angel Charlotte.

Marat, who fought by the side of the Jacobins until Charlotte Corday killed him, earned his title of "The Friend of the People" through his tireless journalistic outpourings, in which he never ceased to spur the masses to new dissatisfaction with their half-victories. He constantly held before the public the simple fact that when they pressed their governors, some gain was made, but that when they rested on that gain, their governors were busy depriving it of any value. A tortured life spent in hovels, hiding-places, in wandering, self-denial and want, did not improve Marat's good-humor; but it did not blight his devotion to the cause of the masses. Yet, giving some notice to his high moral nature, Mr. Shearing is so unfair as to say: "If he ever pondered over the reformation of society it was because he thought that an upheaval might mean an advantage to himself." He sees eye-to-eye with his subject: "Before the Revolution was well begun it was marred by the terrible excesses of the lowest classes." He is as little concerned with the outrages perpetrated on those lowest classes as was that Charlotte Corday whose angelic mission was to attempt in vain the cutting short of the great movement for freedom, by plunging a knife into Marat. TONY CLARK.

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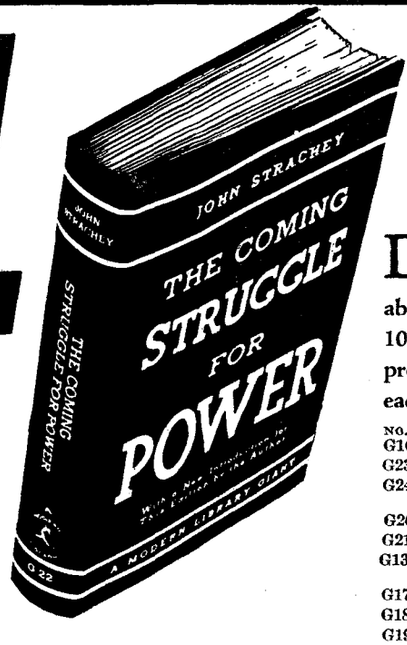

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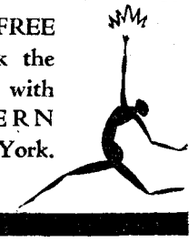

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In the "Let Freedom Ring" Country

WILLIAM F. DUNNE

WITH the rich material in Grace Lumpkin's book *To Make My Bread,* Albert Bein has constructed an authentic, moving and beautiful play depicting the development of a Southern mountaineer family into textile mill hands whose patriarchal and semi-feudal traditions are molded by machine production into the new mores of the class struggles.

The playwright, like the author, and others who have written about "the new South" with its rapid industrialization—rapid as history measures these periods—of an agricultural people, had the task of explaining these people, their method of solving the problems of an impoverished countryside, and their speech, to a Northern audience that knows them only from newspaper stories and articles.

To the direction and to the cast must go immense credit for having appraised correctly the magnitude of this task and of carrying it through successfully—and brilliantly. As far as this writer is concerned, he was enabled to live again through scenes of the 1929 battles in the textile sections of the Carolinas and the heroic resistance of the mountaineer miners in Kentucky and Tennessee in 1931-32. This is not a review of the play as such. This writer wants only to prove that the author and the playwright knew what they were talking about.

Circulating among the audience between acts, listening to the conversations of the white-tie boys and their women, there was to be detected an undertone of approval and overtones of disapprobation. This particular lady said: "Oh, the usual thing. Bolshevism on Broadway. The hero dies a horrible death every night for his class. But it *is* restrained. The restraint in the play is unusual."

The lady was wrong on both counts—and so are most of the reviewers of the metropolitan press. They caught the family angle, but they were unable or unwilling to explain its relation to the class struggle. For example, Brooks Atkinson of The New York Times says: "With people as simple as that, and actors as resolute as that, *Let Freedom Ring* arises out of special causes into the sphere of modern folk-drama. The crises they pass through are incidental to the fundamental integrity of their character."

The truth is that the fundamental integrity of their character is revealed by the crises through which they pass. Directly contrary to the prevailing opinion among the liberal intelligentsia, the patriarchal tradition, the strong family ties, the call of "kin," are not handicaps to the development of a union consciousness, but are tremendous assets—once the semi-feudal bonds are broken by the influx into machine industry of these mountaineer folk.

The best way to show what is meant is by some concrete instances: in 1929, Bessemer City, North Carolina, was one of the best organized towns in the decisive textile area centering around Gastonia. The local union there had bought a house fronting on the hard-surface highway, and made it the union headquarters. At the time of the trial of the Gastonia textile workers, growing out of their armed defense of the striking tent colony in which the chief of police was killed and four of his deputies wounded, the Committee of One Hundred (the strike-breaking organization of the mill owners) staged a raid at night through three counties. They wrecked all union headquarters, kidnaped three union organizers and beat them within an inch of their lives. Newspapermen were still in Charlotte following the mistrial of the defendants and the story of the raid hit the first page of every important paper in the country. One hundred and five cars with three to five armed men in each swept through the Gastonia textile area and it was impossible for the local press to conceal the extent of the raid and its murderous anti-labor character.

Around five o'clock the next morning we drove through the raided territory. The union headquarters in Bessemer City had a sign of which the members were very proud. It was painted with red and black letters on a white background and said: "Textile Union Headquarters." The raiders had torn this sign down and trampled it into the oily, muddy water on the side of the highway. Everything that could be wrecked in the headquarters had been smashed. The long list of members, defiantly giving their addresses and the mills in which they worked, had been torn into smithereens and scattered all over the floor. Books and papers had been wantonly destroyed.

But there was a *new* sign over the front door of the wrecked building. It was painted with axle grease on a piece of white cotton sheeting. It said "Union Headquarters." The S's and the N's were all painted backwards and the sign as a whole staggered somewhat, but no one could mistake its meaning. The union was back and open for business at the same old stand.

In a chair tilted back against the wall, under the new union banner, sat a bewhiskered ancient. He was the grandpap of *Let Freedom Ring.* He fondled a double-barreled shotgun, a beautiful weapon, a Parker, that must have been at least a hundred years old. It had been remodeled from a percussion cap gun to take the modern 12-gauge cartridge.

We stopped and got out. When we drove up he was the only person in sight. In two minutes there were at least a hundred people around us. Where they came from I couldn't say. I asked the old lad one question. "Buckshot?" He said, "Yes, nine in each barrel." (This is interesting just by itself. Three buckshot chambers in a triangle in a 12-gauge cartridge. You put a wad between the layers and then pour melted mutton tallow to within an eighth of an inch of the rim of the shell. Anybody that's willing to risk the impact of such a projectile from point blank to seventy-five yards is too crazy to be living anyway.)

The oldster was taking his responsibilities very seriously but without any particular excitement. And here I want to make a technical criticism of the strike scene of *Let Freedom Ring.* These Southern textile workers never, as far as I know, reveal the intense excitement that is shown in the scene in front of the mill.

The ancient one with his double-barreled shotgun stated quite calmly, as soon as we had identified ourselves, that the new sign was there to stay and if it went down he was going down with it. He was a relative, that is "kin," of some of the officers of the union. To paraphrase the old cowboy song, there was kin all around. The Committee of One Hundred gang, so the old one said, had captured one of his kin during the raid on the union headquarters. They were "chunking him around." The proprietor of a nearby gas-station, who was also one of the kin, came out and told them to "turn

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him loose." The leaders of the gang told him to get back into his place or they'd come in and "get you in a minute." According to the tale, this gas-station proprietor, whose first name was Lem, told them to "make it a long minute." He went in and came back with two pistols. He told them to turn him loose and this time they turned him loose. But, as we say, outside of these minor incidents of this period of industrial warfare, there really was no excitement in Bessemer City.

One of the organizers who had been kidnaped and beaten got up early in the morning, after he had been given medical treatment, and insisted on going back to Gastonia. He was black and blue from his waist down, but he complained only of an unimportant bruise on his right arm. He said he knew a doctor who had a liniment that never failed to cure these bruises, but it cost around $3—which at that time was approximately the price of a box of 12-gauge cartridges. He got the money for the liniment. He wrote out and pasted up a notice in the post-office that he was back home and spent the next 36 hours on the front stoop nursing a repeating shotgun and waiting for members of the Committee of One Hundred to call on him. They never did and his disappointment was as genuine as anything I have ever seen.

These instances are cited to reply to the left-handed praise by certain reviewers concerning the "restraint" shown in *Let Freedom Ring*. This reviewer could not see the "restraint" hailed in the dramatic columns of the Times, Herald Tribune and other metropolitan papers. The truth of the matter is that most of the New York dramatic critics were unable to understand the authentic language of the industrialized Southern mountaineer mill folk used by the cast. A few illustrations will make this clear, and in all fairness it must be said that this writer is himself not completely competent to interpret the various shades of meaning in much of the speech of a people whose language is Shakespearean and some of which goes back to Chaucer.

For instance: if these people say that a certain thing or person is "onfair," it means that they are very indignant. If they say "Hit hain't right," it means that they are very angry. If they say "Hit hain't just," or "Hit's unrighteous," in all probability they are ready to do battle.

It takes some time and patience for a Northerner to get the essence of this old folk-talk and to understand what it really means in terms of the class struggle. But it is *not* restraint. It does, however, carry with it something that even the most sophisticated dramatic critic managed to grasp, *i.e.*, the sense of simple human values and the desire to maintain them even under the degrading conditions of industrialism in textile, coal-mining, the steel industry and associated industries in the deep South.

Some of the reviewers have contended that the violence of the employers in *Let Freedom Ring* is exaggerated. How any one who is conversant with the daily class struggle in America today can take such a position is beyond me. Sweet charity is not one of the outstanding characteristics of this reviewer. My conclusion is that such distortions either are deliberate on the part of the critics or emanate from the copy-desk. And this of course means policy writing.

The bloody record of the general textile strike of last year (Pelzer, for instance), a record which shows the use of violence without stint or limit against the same kind of working people who place their indictment of the present system with such telling force in *Let Freedom Ring,* needs no emphasis to confound the critics who attack the play from this angle.

It is impossible in an article of this length to list and give credit to all those members of the cast who have made a startling and valuable contribution to American labor history.

But one must be mentioned. Gorky's *Mother* has been brought into the American scene by Norma Chambers in the role of Ora McClure. There is nothing incongruous in this because the mother of the textile union organizer, and Kirk McClure's fellow-workers, with whose struggles *Let Freedom Ring* deals, have a peasant background very much like that of the mother and the factory workers in Gorky's masterpiece. The dramatic development of the way in which she comes to stick by her son and his work, when he's alive, and after he has been murdered on the picket line, is as fine a thing as has ever been done on the American stage.

There is one criticism of *Let Freedom Ring*. It should have been dedicated to Ella May Wiggin, the mountaineer woman, textile worker, union organizer and ballad singer who died on the highway between Gastonia and Charlotte, with a bullet in her breast fired by a member of the Committee of One Hundred: Ella May, whose body lies in the graveyard of Bessemer City within sight of the union hall that Grandpap was defending with his shotgun—nine buckshot in each barrel.

Talking with some very sincere friends of *Let Freedom Ring* I felt that they thought the Negro question was handled rather crudely. It can be argued that young McClure makes his appeal for solidarity on the most primitive basis—the need for unity of black and white to lick the boss. All I can say is this is the way we worked in the South—and that all the other political implications flow from this.

One final word: whoever took this bunch of fifty-five actors and made textile workers out of them is wasting his talents on the stage.

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The Theater

Dead End Social Order

WHEN Wordsworth wrote a hundred and thirty years ago that "with the increasing accumulation of men in cities, the uniformity of occupations" would produce "a craving for extraordinary incident," he was anticipating with extraordinary acuteness the commercialized entertainment of today. Morning and evening the gutter-press feeds three million New Yorkers a diet of crime, murder and sex sensationalism — titillation for the work-wearied. And numberless pulp magazines dish out the same swill to millions of readers a year. Every month publishers of mystery books dispatch carload-lots of their products, manufactured to specifications, to distributors throughout the country. Movies and theaters have made fortunes with murder plots, gangster thrillers, etc. Crime sensationalism is one of the great pillars of contemporary culture. And since racketeering is a significant American industry there is every reason that it be reflected in our art. But commercialized entertainment not only accepts crime and its family of social perversions as inevitable but actually swathes them in gaudy heroics. How miraculous, therefore, to encounter the work of an author who rejects commercial cynicism in order to dig under the surface. Sidney Kingsley's *Dead End* (Belasco Theater) is an attempt to trace crime to its true progenitor: no mutation spawned by some diabolical chance but the legitimate brood of a pestilential social order.

When the curtain rises it uncovers a set that leaves nothing to your imagination. Norman Bel Geddes has translated a life-size photograph into three dimensions, and with such brutal clarity that you suddenly find yourself gazing into a dead-end street on a New York riverfront. Boisterous alley kids jump with a splash into what would usually be the orchestra pit. To your left: back entrance to an ultra-luxurious apartment house bordered with a leafy roof-garden; and immediately beside it a row of ramshackle tenements; a grimy black coal-chute to the right. This is not merely the set: it is the whole play, for what occurs behind the footlights can never do more than intensify the visual fact: Millionaire Row rubbing its flank against Rat-and-Louse alley.

There is little in the way of invented plot; such action as there is is merely an extension of your own impression as you sit in the audience; you more or less know what happens in terms of social conduct when the poverty-crushed inhabitants of verminous flats are forced to see day and night the glitteringly luxurious life which their rich neighbors enjoy. Gimpty, a crippled young architect, sensitive to the situation, but thwarted and ineffectual, is hopelessly in love with a sentimental slut who lives with one of the apartment-house dwellers. Babyface Martin, current Public Enemy No. 1, returning to the dead-end street to tell his mother how much he loves her, is recognized by the architect as a boyhood pal. Gimpty informs on Babyface, and the G-men get their man. But Babyface, the fine flower of this alley, has not lived and died in vain. His cycle has already been begun in the life of young Tommy, leader of the alley gang, a twelve-year-old with a shrewd brain, a head full of lice and a fearful adoration for the dead gangster hero. In the space of a dozen minutes, Tommy has robbed a rich boy next door and stabbed his father. Thanks to the society which bred him, he is immediately shipped off to a reform school where he will receive his graduate training in gangsterism.

The dialog carries the same photographic realism of the documentary set. Babyface is the stock Public Enemy that ornaments the tabloids, pulps and movies. The sentimental mistress runs true to type from her first speech to her last; you know in advance that every time she opens her mouth a bromide will fall. The rich boy is a stock character, as are the cops, footman, rich father, etc. For the playwright became so entangled in his material that he allowed it to control him. Indeed, most of the characters are paste-ups from the files of the Daily News and the Mirror. And this explains why, by comparison, two of the characters strike one as original creations: the crippled architect (Gimpty) and young Tommy's older sister. Only they seem to know what is happening in this alley, and in their unclear way they grope around for a solution. It is always a personal solution. Drina seems to have learned only the rudiments of mass action from her experience as a sales-clerk on strike. Gimpty temporizes not out of cowardice, but from a confused motivation partly explained by his feelings of personal inadequacy. Only these two characters suggest the positive direction out of this milieu that foredooms its inhabitants. The burden of ideological balance is heavy indeed, and these two are not quite equal to it.

Does *Dead End,* then, fail to drive home its meaning? Emphatically no; and this is its achievement: that by unequivocal documentation it never permits the audience to doubt that crime and gangsterism are the diseases of society and not of individuals. In an objective sense, *Dead End* is one type of pure propaganda—propaganda unburdened by slogans, platform speeches or manufactured situations. It can be vastly compelling because it merely provides the data and the emotional catalyptic so that the desired reaction takes place in the spectator's mind.

Unfortunately, the emotional force of *Dead End* is not entirely adequate; and this may be observed in its lacks as dramatic art. If "poetry should surprise by a fine excess," this is no less true of drama. *Dead End* rarely pulsates with fresh shocks of surprise. The characters are chiefly types filed away in the common consciousness of our decade. In fact, the whole play remains on a plane of photographic naturalism. Sustaining drama requires something more. But there is reason to believe that the author did not intend sustaining drama but a kind of reportage in

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theater form. He has been successful in fitting together his elements into a smooth, lucent and truthful pattern. And in this he has been enormously aided by the gang of kids who give a piercingly real performance, who move about the stage with electrical swiftness while they hurl patches of everyday speech that stuns one with its savage poetry . . . "You stink on ice," "I'll put you out like a light"—metaphors as bitterly poetic as they are native to the mental climate which breeds them.

STANLEY BURNSHAW.

Current Theater

Jumbo (Hippodrome). It's glittering, it's gorgeous; it's got a menagerie, and clowns, and fire eaters and ax throwers and terrifying aerialists; it lifts you up with a magnificent sweep of theatrical imagination one minute and plops you down on a bum joke the next; it's tuneful and raucous and merry and hollow as a soap bubble; it's got Paul Whiteman's band and Dr. Ostermeier's incredibly beautiful horse; it's got a terrible book that Hecht and MacArthur wrote on an off day; it's got Jimmy Durante with nothing much to do and less to say; it's swell entertainment for the kids (best in town after *The New Gulliver*); it'll probably pack the Hip for a year—and let's hope so, for as the Organizer says in *Squaring the Circle,* "It won't hurt the revolution."

Mother (Civic Repertory Theater). The Theater Union's first production of the season: Maxim Gorky's novel adapted by Bert Brecht with music by Hanns Eisler. To be reviewed next week.

Let Freedom Ring (Broadhurst Theater). A tremendously moving play by Albert Bein, based on Grace Lumpkin's well-known Southern strike-novel *To Make My Bread.* The attendance of all NEW MASSES readers is not merely desirable but essential.

Parnell (Ethel Barrymore). The political career of the Irish nationalist revolutionary, Charles Stewart Parnell, narrowed down to a tale of true love thwarted. Mawkish writing, wobbly acting and splendidly staged. The best scene is a shrewd exposure of Gladstone.

Pride and Prejudice (Music Box). Unusually skillful dramatization of Jane Austen's novel, with its shrewd picture of the mind-shriveling effects of the middle-class nineteenth-century husband-hunting mores. Excellent production. Well worth seeing.

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Art

In Search of Truth

THE taxis were lined up three deep for blocks around as they crawled along waiting their turn to discharge their luxuriously dressed women and evening-clothed men into the Museum of Modern Art. This was a gala. Nothing to surpass it in the city's art history.

Bourgeois art officialdom and particularly Society, had come to pay its respects to Vincent Van Gogh. Somewhat tardily, it is true . . . fifty or so years too late . . . but as Leslie Reade has so effectively pointed out ("Post-Mortem Millions," NEW MASSES, November 5), capitalist society is not quite as perceptive of creative values in the arts as it is in the field of munitions making. This homage to Van Gogh reminded me of an incident of which I heard a few years ago, about a great French writer who had suffered not only the physical torments of poverty and hunger during his early years, but also the racial discrimination and hatred which is the lot of most Jews under capitalism. After many years of hard struggle he achieved such critical standing that even the upper crust of bourgeois society became aware of his talents and began to seek him out for its social functions. One day he received an invitation to a banquet in his honor given by a wealthy lady who in addition to her normal snobbishness was known for her thinly-veiled anti-semitism. (Apparently she was willing to make an "exception" in this case.) The writer at first thought to reply with a curt refusal but changed his mind and decided to accept and go through with it. As the banquet progressed toward its apex and the whole disgusting circus of meaningless drivel and polite poison began to nauseate him, he created a sensation and scandal by walking out on the whole affair just as he was called upon to make the big speech of the evening.

Van Gogh would not only have walked out on this first-night crowd, but he would have (figuratively if not literally) spit upon these worthless parasites and stuffed shirts who had come to "do him honor."[1] Imagine if you can a more incongruous situation. Here was the work of a man who had devoted the best years of his life to a heart-rending, unceasing fight for the poor and destitute . . . the miners, peasants, weavers, the people for whom and among whom he had lived . . . and now the bedecked and bespangled representatives of the exploiting class were using his paintings as an excuse for their own shallow exhibitionism and inane patter. What perversion of history and the meaning of a great artist. What bitter irony. Capitalist society, which had starved, abused and ridiculed Van Gogh into an early suicide; which had rewarded him with the munificent sum of $129 for his art, now valued at $10,000,000 . . . was standing in mock sorrow and reverence to do him honor, its pockets bulging with the cash of the insurance policy. Not without reason is the saying common among artists that "dealers wait for artists to die."

But we need not permit these reactions to a first-night crowd to concern us for too long. There are more important aspects of this exhibition and of Van Gogh's art. For one, the fact that Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and the directors of the Museum have done a splendid job in assembling and effectively mounting an exhibition, providing a rare opportunity for the serious student and lay public to obtain a comprehensive view of Van Gogh's life work.

Van Gogh belongs to the great tradition of revolutionary art. Few people here were aware, prior to this exhibition, of the character of his early work . . . the powerful, somber-colored drawings and paintings of the peasants and workers among whom he lived. It is only when his work is taken in its entirety that it can be understood in its proper significance. Both his early work and his later, impressionist paintings are complementary aspects of a single fundamental attitude. Van Gogh was in search of truth.[2] Violently, uncompromisingly in search of truth. He loved humanity and nature warmly and with passionate intensity. His simplicity was tantamount to a fanatic honesty. He set down on canvas and in drawings his straightforward observations and knowledge of life about him in essentially the same manner . . . whether it was a weaver at work, a peasant woman's head, or a vase of flowers. If in the first instances he saw with low-keyed, almost monochromatic color and heavy earth-like forms and in later years with the blazing swirling color of the impressionists, these differences are superficial rather than fundamental. The vocabulary had changed but the meaning was still the same. Van Gogh was in search of truth.

If he took the orthodox church at its word, attempted to put into practice its preachings among the Borinage miners and was rebuffed by the official representatives of God for his crude, sincere and direct methods, he would turn to art, where *surely* he could tell the truth.

Here he could speak freely, he thought. But he soon learned to his bitter experience that here too was an entrenched hierarchy . . . reactionary and antagonistic to the truth,

[1] ". . . one would rather be in the dirtiest place where there is something to draw, than at a tea party with charming ladies." (From Van G's letters.)

[2] "At bottom nature and the true artists agree." (From Van G's letters.)

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to his truth. Painter, critic and dealer alike had no use for him. What need had a smug, effete mercantile bourgeoisie for these deeply sympathetic, tragic statements of the lives of the working class on the walls of their luxurious homes? They would have none of this awkward uncouth lout . . . who did not know how to draw, nor the meaning of art. Van Gogh's dynamic, radiant statements about nature were no better received than were his earlier statements about humanity. Alike they were treated with antagonism, scorn, ridicule. Even a throbbingly beautiful canvas, now valued at $50,000, of a bunch of flowers, was worthless to the art buyers of his day. Nature too, had to conform to the desires and taste of the dominant class.

The bourgeois press has, with wonder, awe and in some cases poignancy, described the great discrepancy between the present-day value of Van Gogh's art and the reward that society paid him during his life. The story of Van Gogh has been made into a romantic bit of "human-interest stuff" for the Sunday supplement. But the real meaning of Van Gogh they have hidden deep between the lines. For when living artists attempt to follow in Van Gogh's footsteps . . . *to tell the truth* . . . they, too, quickly find themselves outcasts and enemies of the powers that be. Capitalist society honors Van Gogh in the breach. The radical artist today knows that to tell the truth is to be labeled a criminal, a dangerous person, a propagandist, a Red.

If Van Gogh fought individually and blindly for a decent and a better world, and went down to defeat during his lifetime, his work has nevertheless served and will continue to serve as an inspiration to those artists who are today fighting in more organized, clear and conscious manner for the same ends. Van Gogh belongs to us.

STEPHEN ALEXANDER.

La Maternelle

THE Parisian slum, I am sure isn't any different from any other slum. It is obviously overcrowded, unhealthy, and unsafe for children. A film about such a place should have been a violent exposure if not an effective protest. Instead Jean Benoit-Levy and Epstein have fashioned in *La Maternelle* (55th St. Playhouse) a pale moral of pious charity: "there will always be hunger, poverty and misery here. The best we can do is to follow our heroine and smile and be kind and spread as much sunshine as we can into their little dark lives."

Principally this French film tells the story of a love-starved child aching for the maternal love and care her prostitute-mother is unable and unwilling to give her. Also it tells the tale of a young upper-class girl, suddenly made poor by the death of her father. She comes as a maid to this Montmartre nursery school and is so kind and understanding that she not only wins the affection of all of the children and the school's doctor (the romance) but a mother-child relationship develops between her and the jilted child. It indicates that since this single child's problem was solved (the girl adopts the child when she marries the doctor) the problems of the other children are just as simple. Naturally such a theory is unconvincing and is no help whatever to the plot.

However, you do take away with you the unforgettable sequences in which all of the children appear in this studio nursery school. The children are handled so intelligently that they have a documentary quality which takes on a stirring dramatic meaning, independent of the main structure of the film.

PETER ELLIS.

Current Films

Crime et Chatiment (Lenauer-Cinéma de Paris): This French version of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* is an unusually exciting and important film that you should not miss. To be reviewed next week.

Hands Across the Table (Paramount): A fable about a manicurist who goes after riches and finds love with an ex-rich young man who gives *his* rich fiancee the air for the manicurist without money.

Fighting Youth (Universal-B'klyn Fox): The Reds are everywhere. This time the Red terrorists are sending agitators into this country via football teams. The contention of this film is that radical students are undermining the American government by attacking the American student's faith in collegiate football. A film to be boycotted.

The Melody Lingers On (United Artists-Rivoli): The lovers have their night. Then there is mother-love, mother-sacrifice, the Oedipus complex and an aria from *Carmen*.

P. E.

Between Ourselves

WE HAVE received a number of letters—from Harvey O'Connor, Nathan Ausubel and others—in praise of Joseph North's article, "Herndon Is Back in Atlanta" (NEW MASSES, Nov. 5). One reader writes from Kansas City, suggesting that it be republished as a pamphlet. Elizabeth England, author of *Take My Stand,* has adapted it for a mass recital. The article has already been reprinted in several Negro periodicals.

These two important articles will appear in next week's issue:

"Industrial Insurance: A Snare for Workers," by Mort Gilbert and E. A. Gilbert. The Gilberts treat industrial insurance entirely from the policy-holder's viewpoint. This analysis of the gigantic robbery practiced upon the workers of the United States by the insurance companies will form part of a book which the Gilberts are preparing.

"Battle of the Century," by Emanuel Eisenberg. The spectacular clash between David Alfaro Siqueiros and Diego Rivera, Mexico's two best known artists, is described in lively detail by one who was on the battlefield—and in fact stopped a stray punch or two. Only fragmentary and inaccurate accounts of the affair have filtered through from Mexico City, where the Siqueiros-Rivera battle created an enormous sensation.

Readers have been inquiring how John Strachey is able to keep so close to the news in his weekly dispatches. Strachey writes his dispatch on Monday, it comes to us by cable, and the issue is on the newsstands Thursday morning.

We expect to be able to announce next week at least part of the list of contributors to the satirical anti-fascist quarterly issue, which will be dated Dec. 17.

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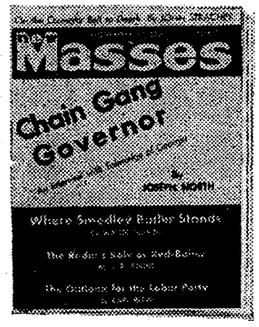

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